
Citation:

Johnson, S and Nunn, A and Bickerstaffe, T and Halliday, S and Kelsey, S and Stevens, A and Wymer, P and Fidler, Y and Clark, J and Green, S and Jinks, J (2006) Phase 2 of the Multiple Provider Employment Zones Qualitative Study, DWP Research Report 399. Project Report. Department for Work and Pensions.

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Department for Work and Pensions

Research Report No 399

Phase 2 evaluation of Multiple Provider Employment Zones: Qualitative study

The Policy Research Institute, Leeds Metropolitan University

A report of research carried out by the Policy Research Institute, Leeds
Metropolitan University on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions

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First Published 2006.

ISBN 1 84712 112 8

ISBN13 978 1 84712 112 7

Views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of the Department for Work and Pensions or any other Government Department.

Printed by Corporate Document Services.

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Acknowledgements

The team would like to express its gratitude to Liz Such and Kris Chapman of the Department for Work and Pensions for their invaluable guidance and support in managing the research. We also acknowledge the input of the members of the Employment Zones Evaluation Steering Group who provided useful comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this report.

Particular thanks go to the Jobcentre Plus and Employment Zone (EZ) managers and staff who helped the research team to undertake the fieldwork within tight timescales, and for giving their time to participate in interviews and focus groups. Similarly, the 60 employers, 18 stakeholders and 121 EZ customers interviewed for this study deserve our thanks.

The Authors

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Abbreviations and acronyms

DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ESG	Employment Strategy Group
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
EZ	Employment Zone
FTA	Failure to Attend
HR	Human Resources
IB	Incapacity Benefit
IS	Income Support
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
LMS	Labour Market System
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
MPEZ	Multiple Provider Employment Zone
ND	New Deal
NDLP	New Deal for Lone Parents
NDYP	New Deal for Young People
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
ODR	Organisation Design Review
PA	Personal Adviser
RAT	Random Allocation Tool

WFI

Work Focused Interview

WTC

Working Tax Credit

Summary

Background

Fifteen Employment Zones (EZs) were introduced in 2000, located in areas with high levels of long-term unemployment. These Employment Zones involved the mandatory referral of long-term claimants of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), aged 25 and over, to private sector Providers of support and guidance. This was extended subsequently to young people (aged 18-24) claiming JSA, who would otherwise have returned to New Deal for Young People (NDYP), lone parents claiming Income Support and some groups deemed appropriate for 'early entry' onto EZs. (Section 1.2)

In 2004, six of the largest EZs (Birmingham, Brent & Haringey, Glasgow, Liverpool & Sefton, Southwark and Tower Hamlets & Newham) were converted into Multiple Provider Employment Zones (MPEZs) with up to three Providers delivering EZ services. Part of the rationale for MPEZs is notionally to test the impact of competition between Providers, with clients being allocated to Providers on a prearranged contractual distribution of market share. (Section 1.2)

This report presents the findings of a qualitative study of the operation and impact of the MPEZ initiative, building on earlier work by Cambridge Policy Consultants, which concentrated on issues related to the early establishment of the MPEZ initiative and the initial experiences of Providers, Jobcentre Plus districts and customers.

The Phase 2 research took place approximately one year on from the Phase 1 study and focused on tracking developments in the operation of MPEZs as the initiative became more established. The study involved interviews with EZ Providers (managers and Advisers), Jobcentre Plus representatives (managers and Advisers) and customers (NDYP returners, lone parents and early entrants). In order to gain a wider perspective, researchers also spoke to representatives of organisations that have employed MPEZ participants and a number of stakeholder organisations with a broad interest in local labour market policies and programmes in the MPEZ areas.

In total, the research involved interviews or group discussions with over 300 individuals, providing a range and depth of qualitative information that allows a detailed picture to be established of the way that MPEZs developed between mid-2005 and mid-2006, including the experiences of employers and the labour market destinations of MPEZ participants. (Sections 1.5 and 1.6)

The specific objectives of the evaluation (Section 1.4) were to:

- understand the relationships and networks linking Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) national officials, local Jobcentre Plus and Providers both within and across MPEZs;
- explore how Providers respond to performance competition within the same labour market;
- explore the relationship between the performance system and casework practices for both mandatory and voluntary clients;
- understand clients' experiences of, and outcomes from, participating in MPEZs; and
- examine Provider strategies for dealing with client choice, how and why lone parents make choices about participation in EZs or New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) and the outcome of these choices.

Key developments since Phase 1

Many of the operational issues encountered during the start-up phase of the MPEZ initiative have been addressed to the satisfaction of EZ Providers and Jobcentre Plus. In particular, respondents reported that technical difficulties with the Random Allocation Tool (RAT) had been largely resolved. (Section 3.2)

Operational changes implemented by EZ Providers have also been driven by the process of learning from the early phase of MPEZ operation, including moves to work more effectively with Jobcentre Plus and increased training of Advisers. (Section 2.1)

The research suggests that job sustainability has become an increasing focus for EZ Providers, with many appointing staff to concentrate solely on providing in-work support. EZ Providers have also begun to adjust their activities to take account of two key changes that have occurred since the Phase 1 evaluation study – the extension of lone parent contracts to all Providers outside London and changes in the structure of payments for lone parent clients and for sustainability of job outcomes. Reductions in the flow of early entrants had also prompted some reassessment of EZ Provider activities and priorities. (Section 5.7)

Operational issues

The MPEZ initiative is 'bedding down' to some extent, with indications of changes that are in line with the objectives of the initiative. Working arrangements between EZ Providers and Jobcentre Plus were felt generally to have improved since the early implementation phase. However, relations and performance have been in some cases affected by changes at Jobcentre Plus, notably the Organisation Design Review and associated reductions in resources. (Section 2.2)

While the RAT was felt to be working correctly in a technical sense, some Providers expressed concern about the level and variability of mandatory client flows. There were also concerns expressed regarding the effectiveness of communication between Jobcentre Plus and EZ Provider personnel in some cases, for example regarding the hardest-to-help clients and those who are potentially violent. (Section 3.2)

EZ Providers operated a range of incentive structures for Advisers and other staff, including financial incentives in some cases. No clear pattern emerged from Provider responses on this issue, other than a feeling that financial factors were only one aspect of the picture in terms of employee motivation.

EZ Providers and other respondents felt, in general, that the incentive structure built into the EZ contracts provided sufficient incentive to Providers to focus attention on getting clients into jobs that will last for at least 13 weeks. The general feeling was that changes in the structure of payments for lone parents were appropriate and provided a greater incentive for EZ Providers to engage with this client group. (Section 2.3)

Some concerns were expressed about the perceived way in which the target system encourages Providers to get clients into jobs as quickly as possible, with some respondents feeling that this may not be appropriate for all clients. EZs are not contractually measured on longer term job sustainability, but some concerns were expressed about this issue. (Section 2.3)

Client experiences and issues

Clients discussed a range of issues affecting their entry into the job market, including lack of confidence, childcare or other caring responsibilities and skills or qualifications deficits. They described a range of experiences and outcomes in relation to their involvement with EZs. Where a choice of Provider was available, clients appreciated this, and there was an indication that a choice of Provider would be preferred by mandatory and early entry clients. (Chapters 4 and 5)

Providers reported a wide range of approaches to working with different types of client, with some indications of significant innovation, particularly in relation to lone parents. While the methodology for the qualitative evaluation was inappropriate for making conclusive judgements about the success of EZ participation in driving

sustainable job entries, there was significant qualitative evidence of clients being moved closer to the labour market by participation in MPEZs, for instance through improved confidence, motivation and more positive attitudes to work. (Chapters 4 and 5)

Some clients expressed dissatisfaction at the quality of job matching, for example pointing out that the relatively low-level jobs taken were not necessarily different to those available through Jobcentre Plus. Overall, findings suggest that EZs are addressing a range of barriers to client job entry, but in some cases it appears that the barriers may be beyond the capacity of Providers to address. (Chapters 4 and 5)

Comments specific to the different client groups were as follows:

- **Lone parents** discussed the barriers they face, particularly difficulties with managing affordable childcare, a lack of confidence, or in some cases experiences of prejudice due to status. Providers emphasised the importance of a flexible approach, help regarding childcare, the need for training provision, and the need to accommodate children on site (including Health and Safety issues).
- **NDYP returners** face similar barriers to those of other groups, but with particular emphasis on lack of work experience, transport issues, lack of confidence and motivational issues. There was anecdotal evidence for NDYP returners being more receptive to MPEZs than other mandatory clients, but as having lower retention rates once they started work.
- **Early entrants:** The experiences and reports about early entrants were similar to those of other groups, except that they were much more likely to report that they did not understand the referral process, and there was some evidence that the Random Allocation Tool (RAT) acted as a deterrent from entry onto EZ. There was some evidence of innovative working practices in relation to early entrants.
- **Most disadvantaged clients:** Dealing with those with the most severe problems was seen as a challenge for EZ Providers, some of whom had contracted with specialist alcohol or drug dependency support or other specialist help.
- **Other:** English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) clients had specific needs which Providers were seeking to meet, for example, through adapting their own provision. Older people were seen as needing interventions to build self-confidence and motivation.

Added value

EZ Providers, Jobcentre Plus respondents, stakeholders and employers described a number of ways in which the programme adds value. The key benefits concern the resources available to support clients and flexibility in their use. Findings indicated the usefulness of intensive one-to-one work with clients outside the setting of Jobcentre Plus, focusing on barriers to work and practical steps to overcome these, appropriate job matching, and a robust approach to clients who are able to work but

do not want to. A business-like and personalised approach, which is attractive to employers, was described, as was the potential to provide in-work support to a greater extent than is the case for other labour market programmes. (Section 6.1)

Many employers clearly value their linkages with EZ Providers and, for some, EZ Providers are important sources of recruitment, although others preferred Jobcentre Plus provision or expressed no preference. Findings indicated that the clear focus on job outcomes, as opposed to the wider responsibilities of Jobcentre Plus, is useful. While there were other areas for which benefits associated with the EZ arose from the organisational separation from Jobcentre Plus, these appeared to be less important than resources and flexibility. (Section 6.2)

The added value of the Multiple Provider approach is less clear from the research findings, with the view expressed generally that it is too early to tell and that potential advantages need to be balanced against the fact that large numbers of clients are allocated randomly and have no choice about Providers. (Section 6.4)

The findings indicated some advantages, including the way in which healthy competition helps to keep Providers 'on their toes', and the development of innovative services, particularly for lone parents. However, findings also indicated disadvantages regarding the competitive element, including the way in which clients might become confused by the range of Providers and services, and the way in which competition might act as a barrier to partnership working. In principle, competition might enable Providers to specialise in particular client groups, employers or sectors, but this is constrained by the random allocation approach. (Section 6.4)

Issues for consideration

The study highlighted a number of key issues, which are set out in Section 7.8. There are issues regarding the client base, in particular an increasing proportion of 'hardest-to-help' customers, which is likely to continue in the future. Issues included drug or alcohol dependency, mental or other health issues, language and/or basic skills issues, participation in the grey economy, economic considerations (low paid work providing little more financially than benefits) or being embedded in second or third generation unemployed families and communities. Providers expressed some concern about their capacity to deal with these types of client issue and the limited availability of specialist support.

The research suggests that some customers across the different client groups may face difficulties beyond the 13-week period in terms of retaining jobs, indicating a possible need for EZ to be linked more closely to employer training and skills initiatives.

The current model does not appear yet to be fulfilling its potential to stimulate innovation in service provision. The main factor influencing quality appears to be the competitive nature of contracts, and there are questions about whether there should be some formal quality assurance system and/or a mechanism for the systematic collection/analysis of customer and employer feedback on EZs.

There are indications that some specialisation (for example in terms of client groups, services provided or sector focus) amongst Providers is starting to occur. This would clearly be boosted by choice for mandatory clients, but the implications for management, for example advertising, require attention. Providers indicated that, in principle, they would be happy for choice for mandatory clients to occur. Issues regarding how this might be achieved and the potential effects on Providers (including reductions in flows for some) will need to be addressed. There would also need to be attention to ensuring full provision of information to clients, and mechanisms to support accountability.

The research indicated a concern with wider strategic issues. There is evidence of good partnership working in a number of localities. In some instances there appears to be a need for greater 'fit' with local initiatives and partnerships – both greater participation by EZ Providers in partnerships, and better overall management and integration of initiatives. There is, in a minority of cases, a tension between locality-based initiatives and EZ provision.

Also, there are potentially large consequences of moving from random allocation to full competition, such as the potential development of local monopolies and the more widespread use of incentives for clients to sign up as well as job entries and sustainability. There are also wider labour market issues, which are indicated by the research but are beyond the scope of the evaluation.

1 Background

1.1 Introduction

This report presents the findings of a qualitative study of the operation and impact of the Multiple Provider Employment Zone (MPEZ) initiatives that have operated in four cities (London, Birmingham, Liverpool and Glasgow) since 2004¹. The study builds on earlier work by Cambridge Policy Consultants (Hirst et al. 2006), which concentrated on issues related to the early establishment of the MPEZ initiative and the initial experiences of Providers, Jobcentre Plus districts and customers.

The Phase 2 research took place approximately one year on from the Phase 1 study and focused on tracking developments in the operation of MPEZ as the initiative became more established. The study involved interviews with EZ Providers (managers and Advisers), Jobcentre Plus representatives (managers and Advisers) and customers (young people (aged 18-24) claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), who would otherwise have returned to New Deal for Young People (NDYP)², lone parents receiving Income Support and early entrants – see section 1.6 for full details). In order to gain a wider perspective, researchers also spoke to representatives of organisations that have employed MPEZ participants and a number of stakeholder organisations with a broad interest in local labour market policies and programmes in the MPEZ areas.

In total, the research involved interviews or group discussions with over 300 individuals, providing a range and depth of qualitative information that allows a detailed picture to be established of the way that MPEZs developed between mid-2005 and mid-2006, including the experiences of employers and the labour market destinations of MPEZ participants.

¹ For further details on MPEZ see www.employmentzones.gov.uk.

² For ease of exposition, this group of EZ clients is referred to throughout this report as 'NDYP returners'.

A central issue addressed in the research and in this report is the **'multiple'** element of the initiative and the value that is added through the existence of more than one Provider in each MPEZ area. Questions of allocation, choice, specialisation, competition and innovation are considered from the perspectives of Providers, Jobcentre Plus, customers, employers and stakeholders and the final sections present some conclusions and issues for consideration in relation to these topics.

1.2 Multiple Provider Employment Zones

1.2.1 Background and client group eligibility

Fifteen³ Employment Zones (EZs) were introduced in 2000, located in areas with high levels of long-term unemployment. These EZs involved the mandatory referral of long-term claimants of JSA, over the age of 25, to private-sector Providers of support and guidance. The EZ contracts included strong financial incentives to the private-sector Providers based on sustained job entries and were intended to bring new and innovative results-focused approaches to assist the unemployed into work. The 2002 Spending Review announced the intention to extend the client groups that were eligible for EZs. Young people (aged 18-24) claiming JSA, who would otherwise have returned to NDYP were introduced as a mandatory client group and lone parents were offered the choice of New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) or EZ. Certain other clients became eligible for 'early entry' to EZ (see Appendix A for a full list of early entry criteria).

Early entrants can choose to attend EZs, but once they have made this choice their participation is mandatory. For all mandatory client groups, non-attendance at the EZ can affect their benefit entitlement. In 2003, four of the largest EZs (in Birmingham, Liverpool, London⁴ and Glasgow) were converted into MPEZs. MPEZs involve up to three contractors delivering Employment Zone provision. Part of the rationale for MPEZs is notionally to test the impact of competition between Providers. However, for the vast majority of clients there is no choice over which

³ The original four London districts were subsequently amalgamated into two, leaving thirteen EZ areas in total.

⁴ Strictly speaking, London contains three MPEZ areas (Southwark; Tower Hamlets/Newham; Brent/Haringey). Throughout this report, however, all of these MPEZ areas are referred to as 'London'.

Provider they attend, and clients are allocated to Providers on a prearranged contractual distribution of market share.

1.2.2 Payments and stages of participation⁵

Contract payments to the EZ Providers are outcome-related, based on clients first entering and then sustaining work. Payments are structured around the stages of client participation in the EZ:

- **Stage 1** – This lasts for a maximum of four weeks and involves working with the client to identify barriers to entering employment and the drawing up of an Action Plan of activities and support to overcome this. Providers receive a set fee for this period (with the exception of lone parent clients, who enter Stage 2 directly).
- **Stage 2** – This lasts for a maximum of 26 weeks and involves the delivery of the Action Plan with the intention of entering employment. Providers receive a single payment equivalent to 21 weeks of JSA. For lone parents, Providers receive engagement fees, which are received at intervals. During this period, the Provider is responsible for paying the client their benefit entitlement but can retain any surplus if they enter work swiftly. Providers also receive a payment for those clients who enter work.
- **Stage 3** – This involves a period of support to clients who enter work. The aim is to sustain the client in work for a period of at least 13 weeks. The Provider receives a payment for five weeks' sustained employment and is eligible for a substantial further payment, should employment be sustained for at least 13 weeks.
- **Follow-on support** – This lasts for a maximum of 22 weeks for mandatory clients who have not secured a job at the end of Stage 2, but who wish to continue the process. Providers receive no additional funding and must continue to bear responsibility for the client's benefit payments but they can claim job entry and sustainability payments.
- Initially, all Providers were also able to achieve an aggregate **performance bonus** based on achieving a negotiated target of clients that they helped to enter and sustain work.

⁵ Contractual issues are reviewed on a regular basis. The details presented in this chapter relate to the position in March 2006, immediately prior to the fieldwork stage of the research.

1.2.3 Recent changes to the MPEZ model

In essence, the MPEZ programme remained unchanged between Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the qualitative evaluation. A number of changes in the precise operation of the initiative did, however, take place and are relevant to this report. They are:

- **Extension of lone parent provision** to all Providers outside London: previously only one Provider in each of Birmingham, Liverpool and Glasgow was contracted to provide services for lone parents. Since November 2005, all Providers can provide services for lone parents. In London, NDLP provision was discontinued in April 2004, while NDLP continues in the other MPEZ districts.
- Changes in the level and structure of payments to Providers in relation to **lone parent engagement** to encourage continuous engagement throughout Stage 2.
- Changes in the level and structure of payments to Providers in relation to **job sustainability** so that these are now paid in three instalments: at job entry, after five weeks in work and after 13 weeks in work.
- Removal of the six month **Performance Bonus**.

1.3 Summary of Phase 1 findings⁶

Phase 1 of the MPEZ evaluation found that Providers were generally happy with the pricing structure for mandatory clients but less so for the price set for lone parents. Moreover, many Provider lone parent Personal Advisers (PAs) pointed to the fact that lone parents in MPEZs could not access longer-term vocational training or the fast-track process to in-work benefits that were available to those joining NDLP.

During this first phase of MPEZs, relations between MPEZ Providers and Jobcentre Plus managers were generally good but somewhat less so at the operational level between Providers and some local Jobcentre Plus offices. Lack of information concerning the services on offer to clients by Providers and the explicit direction by Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) not to make recommendations to clients, left many Jobcentre Plus staff feeling they had been placed in an invidious position. For their part, some Providers were not convinced that Jobcentre Plus were concentrating upon selling the MPEZ offer to clients.

As the MPEZ first phase developed, there were signs that the presence of multiple Providers had added an edge to the Providers' delivery – making them more keen and innovative – with the new Providers demonstrating they could deliver effectively alongside their more established counterparts. After some initial teething problems,

⁶ For full details of the findings of the Stage 1 study, see Hirst, A., Tarling, R., Lefauchaux, M., Short, C., Rinne, S., MacGregor, A., Glass, A., Evans, M. and Simm, C., (2006) Evaluation of Multiple Provider Employment Zones: early implementation issues, Department for Work and Pensions Research Report 310.

the random allocation process was also seen to be working well – although the Providers did not agree with the process being extended to early entrants. Commercial logic suggested that any innovations in engaging early entrants would be devalued by the ‘sharing out’ of any benefits or marketing and outreach.

Of the lone parents engaged directly by Providers, not all were aware that they had a choice between different MPEZ Providers (in London) or between MPEZ and NDLP (outside London). In London, referrals from Jobcentre Plus represented the main route for lone parents starting MPEZ. Yet, outside London, the vast majority of lone parents continued to sign up to NDLP at their first Work Focused Interview (WFI). As a result, lone parent flows to MPEZs were low.

All Providers were seen to be experimenting with different approaches to providing client support, as well as adopting a diverse set of methods to engage and work with employers. Providers proved to be very effective at building confidence and motivation in many clients and channelling this into more effective job search and longer-term employment goals. They also used specialist staff to build relationships with employers, learn more about their recruitment needs and take advantage of future vacancy projections. However, clients’ perceptions of the range and quality of the vacancies on offer were mixed.

In dealing with young clients, Providers found them a challenge but in the main very responsive when successfully engaged and also very flexible.

Providers reported that many lone parents favoured education/training in preparation for work, rather than fully engaging with the work-first provision that was the cornerstone of the MPEZ model. Subsequently, Provider outreach activity tended to concentrate on those lone parents who would benefit from work-first provision. For their part, those lone parents interviewed reported more effective job search with specialist caseworkers and improved skills being the main benefit of MPEZ.

As the first phase of MPEZ progressed, the volumes of early entrants remained very low but of those who had gone through the programme, many reported improved confidence and skills as direct benefits of their involvement.

1.4 Research aims, objectives and questions

The specific objectives of the Stage 2 evaluation were to:

- understand the relationships and networks linking DWP national officials, local Jobcentre Plus and Providers both within and across MPEZs;
- explore how Providers respond to performance competition within the same labour market;
- explore the relationship between the performance system and casework practices for both mandatory and voluntary clients;
- understand clients’ experiences of, and outcomes from, participating in MPEZs;

- examine Provider strategies for dealing with client choice, how and why lone parents make choices about participation in EZs or NDLP and the outcome of these choices.

These broad objectives were broken down further into a number of specific research questions:

Setting up and developing local and wider networks

- How do EZs develop an understanding of local labour markets?
- What external provision do EZs use? How do EZs monitor quality of external provision?
- Is there networking across EZs (between Providers/Jobcentre Plus)? What form does it take and does it change over time?
- How are relationships with Jobcentre Plus, DWP and employers managed? Are there changes over time? How do EZs attract vacancies and make submissions?
- How are performance indicators developed and monitored? How are incentives and disincentives of the EZ performance system identified and managed?

Random allocation and client choice

- How is the creation of a 'level playing field' via Random Allocation monitored?
- How does random allocation work in Jobcentre Plus offices? How are Jobcentre Plus PAs handling randomly allocating clients?
- How do mandatory clients assess the random allocation process?
- How do EZs market to lone parents and how does the referral process from a WFI operate?
- How and why do lone parents make the decision to participate in EZs? How do they feel about this decision once in an EZ? Do they feel empowered by having a choice?
- Is there evidence of lone parents 'switching' between EZ and NDLP provision or between different EZs?
- What is the role of Jobcentre Plus and EZs in encouraging/influencing 'choice'?

Working with different client groups

- What are the key factors in explaining the success/lack of success in EZ for the different client groups? Do variations exist across EZs that provide examples of best practice?
- Is there evidence of innovation and flexibility in supporting participants into work? Is there evidence of change in EZ practices over time?
- How do EZs fulfil the rights and responsibilities agenda? What are their processes for sanctioning?

- What do EZ managers envisage are the key issues in incorporating the new groups successfully into EZs? Is provision client-specific? Do they refine their ideas over time?
- How do they network with relevant external Providers and employers? How do they market their clients to employers?
- How does the EZ influence work plans, skills, confidence and motivation towards employment? What impact do EZs have on the different client groups over time (beyond 13 weeks in employment), what impacts (if any) do EZs have on clients who do not enter work from the programme?
- How do EZs work with the 'hardest-to-help' **young people** such as those with drug addiction problems, basic skills needs, etc?

Lone parents

- What systems do EZs have in place for a voluntary client group and are they distinct from those for mandatory clients?
- How do EZs deal with the specific barriers to employment faced by lone parents, e.g. childcare, health problems, confidence/skills? Do EZs help lone parents address/manage barriers to work?

NDYP returners

- How does EZ provision differ from NDYP e.g. focus on work-first rather than training, etc?
- How do young people view their experiences on the two contrasting employment programmes? On which programme do they feel they have more choice/flexibility and how is this manifested?

Early entrants

- How do EZs approach customers with a range of disadvantages? Is their approach different to other groups?
- Do EZs recruit specialist help?

1.5 Research methods

The fieldwork consisted of the following:

- Interviews with nine managers of MPEZ Providers across the four MPEZ areas (Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham, London).
- Nine focus groups with EZ Advisers in the same organisations.
- Interviews with eight Jobcentre Plus District Managers in the MPEZ areas.
- Ten focus groups with Jobcentre Plus Advisers in the same districts.
- Interviews with 121 MPEZ customers.

- Interviews with 60 employers that have employed people through MPEZ.
- Interviews with 18 stakeholders involved in labour market programmes within the MPEZ areas.

1.6 The client sample group

The DWP asked that qualitative work with clients be limited to three specific clients groups: early entrants, NDYP returners and lone parents, thereby excluding those mandatory clients aged 25+ and claiming JSA.

As part of the first phase of the evaluation, the research consortium carried out approximately 240 face-to-face interviews with EZ participants (cohort one). This first stage of interviews, held in March and April 2005, occurred whilst the participants were still on the programme – mainly in Stage 2 of the process (the majority of these cohort one participants started the programme in summer 2004).

The initial intention was to conduct a longitudinal study and that the second phase would include interviews with up to 120 of these cohort one interviewees to chart their progress since completing the programme. However, due to data protection concerns, only 90 cohort one participants' contact details were passed on for follow-up. Of the 90 first cohort one interviewees, 45 agreed to take part in the follow up. None of these were early entrants.

To achieve a final sample size of 120 client interviews, it was necessary to boost the cohort one numbers, which was achieved through the addition of new clients to the sample group from DWP databases. Where necessary these client respondents are referred to as cohort two. To ensure comparability of the data, it was intended that clients should have completed their participation on the EZ by the time they were interviewed, though in practice there were a small number of respondents who were still in Stage 3 or follow-up at the time they were interviewed.

The structure of the client sample was split between client groups, cohort groups, the six MPEZ districts and the different Providers.

All potential client respondents were contacted by letter, informing them of the research, along with a proforma to be completed and returned to the Policy Research Institute, inviting them to either opt-in or opt-out of the study. Those who opted in were contacted and, where possible, interviews were arranged. To make up the numbers in each area those customers who had not returned a proforma were then contacted by phone and invited for interview.

The interviews were held in 'neutral' venues at locations convenient to the interviewees and all took place between 28 February and 5 April 2006. On average, the interviews lasted 29 minutes, with the shortest taking 14 minutes and the longest 55 minutes. In total, 121 customer interviews were conducted across the six MPEZ districts. However, in some instances, where interviewees failed to turn up for the arranged face-to-face interview, these interviews were rearranged and conducted

over the telephone. As such, 100 of the interviews were carried out face-to-face with 21 being conducted by telephone. Table 1.1 demonstrates the distribution of the client interviews by EZ and client group.

Table 1.1 Distribution of client interviews by Employment Zone and customer group

MPEZ district	Number
Birmingham	20
Brent/Haringey	20
Liverpool	20
Glasgow	20
Southwark	21
Tower Hamlets	20
Total	121
Customer group	
Early entrants	31
Lone parents	51
NDYP returners	39
Total	121

The interviews and focus groups followed a topic guide format (see Appendix B) that enables comparisons to be made between the responses of the different groups described above to identical or similar questions. The precise topics covered and questions asked varied between the different respondent groups but in general, the discussions followed a similar pattern with the following topics being addressed in most cases:

- Changes in MPEZ provision since Phase 1.
- The development and operation of wider networks.
- Performance indicators and incentives.
- The random allocation process.
- Referral processes and flows.
- Referral of lone parents.
- Working with different client groups.
- Specific issues: lone parents.
- Specific issues: NDYP returners.
- Specific issues: early entrants.
- Sustainability.
- Added value of MPEZs.

1.7 Structure of this report

This report continues by examining the operation and performance of MPEZs (Chapter 2), in particular, the relationship between EZ Providers in local and wider networks, their use of performance indicators and incentives and the views of respondents on the incentives provided through the payment structure.

Chapter 3 considers the processes by which customers are referred to EZ Providers, both in terms of the random allocation of mandatory customers and the mechanisms through which voluntary customers (primarily lone parents) are attracted to different Providers.

In Chapter 4, we describe and assess the ways in which Providers work with the main client groups and the services provided for different types of client, outlining the perspectives of clients, EZ Providers and Jobcentre Plus respondents. The focus is upon changes and developments since the Stage 1 research and on bringing in the perspectives of employers and stakeholders that were not covered in the earlier study.

Chapter 5 sets out some key issues arising from this review of provisions, including a discussion of the extent to which and ways in which MPEZ helped clients to progress in the labour market.

Chapter 6 summarises the views of respondents in relation to the added value of MPEZs and sets out some suggestions made by respondents for improving EZ provision.

Finally, Chapter 7 reviews the main findings and sets out some issues to be considered as the MPEZ programme develops in the future.

2 Operation and performance

2.1 Key changes over the previous year

2.1.1 Lone parent provision

For the Employment Zone (EZ) Providers, the most significant changes over the previous year related to the lone parent client group. In particular, the EZ Providers outside London that had not previously been able to supply services under EZ for lone parents were able to do so from November 2005. Changes in the tariff structure for lone parents, were also introduced in November 2005. Collectively, these changes were noted by some EZ respondents as having an impact on their operations and, in general, providing a greater incentive than previously to undertake activity designed to increase the number of lone parent clients. In some cases, EZ Providers were able to take on more designated staff and felt they were able to offer a better service overall to lone parents. The predominant view among EZ Providers was that these changes collectively meant that lone parents were now seen as a much more important client group and Providers had made significant changes in response to them. As such, some Providers had established separate facilities for lone parents and others had been forced to reconsider the arrangement of their offices in order to accommodate parents with children using them. Providers had also made significant efforts to market their services to lone parents, resulting in increased efforts to build relationships with Jobcentre Plus staff and to advertise in the local media. Where Providers were already providing services to lone parents, the changes in the financial structure meant that the services to this group could be improved.

2.1.2 Organisation and operation

In terms of internal operational procedures, EZ Providers noted a general trend towards increased and more formal training for Advisers. Good practice is exemplified by one EZ Provider which has a strong commitment to investing in people and has a

large number of Advisers engaged in NVQ Level 3 in guidance. There is some indication that the training needs of Advisers are changing – several EZ Providers discussed an increase in ‘hardest-to-help’ referrals, including people with significant mental health problems and alcohol/drug dependency issues, and one contributor discussed a need for Advisers to be trained to deal with these cases. In another case, Advisers also noted an increased emphasis on counselling and communication skills development in their training, as a result of feedback provided on initial training offered by the Provider.

Some Providers had experimented with various methods of reorganising their resources, for instance in establishing dedicated in-work support or liaison posts to improve the working relationship with Jobcentre Plus. Providers in several areas had undertaken other measures to improve the relationship and mutual understanding with Jobcentre Plus, such as staff visits and briefing sessions.

2.1.3 Jobcentre Plus perspectives

Jobcentre Plus contributors discussed the way in which the performance of the EZ reflects the time and effort required to set up and effectively run a partnership initiative like the Multiple Provider Employment Zone (MPEZ). In some districts, individual Providers had already become known and established, and some contributors reported greater results from EZ partners over the past year. In general, work seemed to be going well, although in a couple of localities there was some evidence from Jobcentre Plus respondents that the Providers had perhaps not anticipated all that was needed and had had to change rapidly in order to deal with the flow of referrals. In general, building up of links and trust with partners and clients has taken time.

A further specific change mentioned by Jobcentre Plus contributors, included technical improvements in the operation of the Random Allocation Tool (RAT). Previously, the problems with the RAT had often failed or took a long time to allocate clients. This is no longer the case, though many Jobcentre Plus respondents still suggested that they allocated clients in their absence, a practice which was initially adopted because of previous problems with the RAT.

Jobcentre Plus respondents also noted other changes in EZ management. This included increased variations in the provision to lone parents, particularly experiments with outreach provision and marketing and an increased emphasis on utilising links with Jobcentre Plus offices, for instance through staff visits and increased communication. Jobcentre Plus respondents further noted that clients being referred to EZ Providers were becoming harder to help. There was also a perception among some Jobcentre Plus respondents that budgetary constraints had led to a markedly reduced emphasis on offering EZ participation to clients eligible for early entry, for example:

'...early entrants are not done as a matter of course now...that did produce some good results but then the Department clamped down on early entrants – they are only supposed to be for those that really need early entry, rather than just to boost the numbers going through the programme.'

(Jobcentre Plus manager)

Jobcentre Plus respondents suggested that although in some localities significant improvements in Providers' networking and partnership work had taken place, in certain instances, individual and organisational relations could still be improved upon. This view was also confirmed by some stakeholders.

For some Jobcentre Plus staff, recent significant reductions in general resources linked to the Organisation Design Review (ODR) – and the decrease in external provision in particular – were brought into sharp relief in the light of the flexibility available to Providers under the EZ contracts. For example, one Jobcentre Manager described the way in which:

'We continue to be under-staffed and there is a reduction of staff in the offices, and we are waiting for the allocation for 2006-2007, especially as we are rolling out the IB pathways, which involves working closely with IB clients and we need more staffing...time is even more at a premium now for Personal Advisers partly because of the introduction of a new computerised system and changes across the benefit system which are taking time to bed down...EZ people have sometimes been drawn into dealing with this so we have had to juggle resources more and this has impacted on EZ work.'

Jobcentre Plus contributors described a wide range of impacts that resulted from budget cuts and restructuring. In some cases, these were making it difficult to efficiently manage liaison with EZ Providers. In one locality, the manager highlighted the negative impact of reorganisation on staff morale. In another, a staff member suggested that whilst the pressure to find jobs has been removed from Advisers, Jobcentre Plus appears to have *'lost control'* of the process of engaging and working with customers. Moreover, some Jobcentre Plus respondents reported that they were often asked to resolve problems with EZ clients' in-work benefit claims and Jobcentre Plus staff felt that this service was often taken for granted and undervalued by EZ staff. Jobcentre Plus respondents also felt that this did not help the customer who often did not understand the administrative process and additional and unrecognised work was often involved in anticipating and coping with the resulting workload.

2.2 Development and operation of local and wider networks

2.2.1 Working arrangements with Jobcentre Plus

Throughout all of the MPEZ areas, Providers were generally positive about their relationship with Jobcentre Plus, in terms of both district and local office levels. Factors that were seen as facilitating good relations included senior level contact via meetings and involvement in strategic employment partnerships, good informal links between individuals and a high level of mutual understanding of organisational processes and service delivery by Jobcentre Plus and EZ staff.

In one case, for instance, a contributor discussed a good working relationship with Jobcentre Plus which meant that any difficulties could be honestly addressed. In general, Providers reported that initial suspicions and tensions in the relationship had receded somewhat and that working relations were now generally effective. In some cases, contributors discussed improvements in relations over the last year, for example, as a result of programmes of information sharing and staff visits between Jobcentre Plus and EZ Providers.

Despite these generally good relations, it is clear from the research that the quality of the relationship between Jobcentre Plus and the EZ Providers is highly variable at office level. In some instances, EZ Advisers reported problems with communication, and interaction with different Jobcentre Plus staff. For example:

'I have felt some distinct resentment from some Jobcentres here. We appear to be seen as the people with the money coming in to save the day, just at the same time when Jobcentre Plus is undergoing massive budget cuts. Understandable, I suppose, but hardly likely to help get long-term unemployed people into jobs.'

EZ respondents suggested that there was significant scope for improvements in the flow of information about clients. One Provider said that they expected more resources from Jobcentre Plus to be devoted to communication and liaison with EZs. Examples of problems in communication, included processes for dealing with clients failing to attend or the failure of Jobcentre Plus to notify EZs that of clients specific needs (where for instance they have mental health or behavioural problems, drugs or alcohol dependency) or where clients are potentially violent. Where clients fail to attend and are sanctioned by Jobcentre Plus, Providers did not always feel that they fully understood the process. They also highlighted delays in administering the process on the part of Jobcentre Plus, with implications for the ability of EZ Providers to deliver their contractual obligations to the client, especially during the Stage 1 action planning process. Some EZ staff reported incidences of violence toward them that might have been avoided if this information had been passed on in advance of a client being referred. Other areas where information flow might be enhanced related to the process of administering client complaints about EZs.

EZ respondents felt that the process of communication, information flow and the implementation of internal Jobcentre Plus procedures was not helped by frequent changes of personnel in Jobcentre Plus, cutbacks, and low morale throughout the organisation. Further, it was also reported that a culture of role specialisation in Jobcentre Plus meant that handling even basic queries was dependent on individuals being available. If those individuals were unavailable, unnecessary delays could occur. Providers also identified rigid and overly bureaucratic systems as contributing to tensions in communication between them.

In addition, some EZ respondents identified reductions in Jobcentre Plus budgets with a reduction in the external provision available to Jobcentre Plus Advisers with the consequence that EZ Providers were increasingly seen as solely responsible for training provision. It was also identified as being partly responsible for EZ referrals being increasingly hard to help.

Despite these problems, some Providers had made efforts to build personal connections with Jobcentre Plus staff. Events had been held to promote networking and there had been mutual visits of staff to each office. In one case, the introduction of competition in relation to lone parents had prompted the Provider to attempt to build closer relationships by providing regular feedback on the progress of clients referred to them in order to enhance the likelihood of positive messages being given to clients by Jobcentre Plus staff.

In general, views and comments provided by Jobcentre Plus contributors centred upon how an initial slow start by the Providers had developed to a point whereby local networks and partnerships now appear to be quite well established. In all cases, monthly operational meetings, and quarterly strategy meetings between Jobcentre Plus and Providers take place. Meetings tend to cover operational issues such as performance, process issues and problems. There were variations in the effectiveness of this interaction and in one locality the District Manager is no longer attending on a regular basis and a Liaison Officer has taken up this role. Generally, though, these meetings are described as useful, for example, one contributor noted the way that they have been able to look at each Provider's performance in a joint forum, although detailed operational information is not discussed due to commercial confidentiality issues. In some localities Jobcentre Plus managers also have regular meetings with individual Providers.

While Jobcentre Plus respondents acknowledged the general positive impact of activities designed to promote better relationships between Providers and Jobcentre Plus offices, some were sceptical about the motivations of these: *'they are nice to us because they make an awful lot of money out of us'*. On the other hand, the practice of certain Providers of appointing a dedicated Jobcentre Plus Liaison Officer drew particular positive mention by Jobcentre Plus staff in those MPEZ areas.

Where tensions remained between Jobcentre Plus staff and the EZ, they attributed this to the additional flexibility and resources available to EZ Advisers, a perceived lack of transparency concerning Provider activity, and a lack of mutual understanding

of internal processes, rules and procedures. Some Jobcentre Plus respondents highlighted the potential future impact of EZs on the delivery of Jobcentre Plus services. For example, one group of Jobcentre Advisers viewed EZs as a preliminary to further privatisation of Jobcentre services. As one Jobcentre Plus manager said:

'There is a cultural barrier to EZ here where some people think that we are handing over our clients – that we could have worked with them if we had been able to offer incentives. There is resentment – we are having our resources cut and people are being handed over. This was a disincentive especially in the early days and we are still working with it. The bulk of Advisers are now coming around to seeing that EZ helps them although sometimes they are aggrieved that they cannot offer incentives.'

Managers seemed, in some cases, to be more positive about EZs than Advisers, for example:

'At a high level, relations are excellent – open, honest and issues are addressed. AT a PA level we find that one of the Providers is less helpful on a day to day level – there are difficulties with getting the paperwork back. Some of the Providers are better than others, but they have improved overall.'

(Manager)

'It is scandalous. We are giving money to another organisation when we could be doing the work. We have no money for training now.'

(Adviser in the same locality)

Other factors also impacted on the perceptions of the EZ Providers among Jobcentre Plus staff and their relationship. These included apparently high levels of EZ staff turnover, especially in the initial period, and a reported tendency of Provider staff to only contact Jobcentre Plus in relation to problems. Other Jobcentre Plus staff reported that they perceived EZ Provider staff to be excessively harsh with clients or that they lacked knowledge of the benefits system.

'Often, a Provider will inform the Jobcentre Plus that a lone parent client has entered work, but it is obvious that they have not properly informed the client as to their responsibilities in terms of signing off, having an in-work benefit calculation, and so on...'

(Jobcentre Plus Adviser)

Jobcentre Plus staff also identified the commercial imperatives and motivations of EZ Providers as negatively impacting on the relationship between them:

'...they are fine when I phone up, I get on with them but they are working for a business, so they can be a bit ruthless.'

(Jobcentre Plus Adviser)

While Jobcentre plus retains the responsibility for performance at district level, the management of EZ contracts is handled centrally. This means that despite having overall responsibility for job outcome performance, Jobcentre Plus managers at district level lack the capacity to effectively scrutinise or affect Provider delivery. The implication is that they have little influence over the availability or quality of local provision. This is more acutely felt as a result of the reductions in budgets for provision available to Jobcentre Plus.

2.2.2 Partnership working

MPEZ Providers in all districts stated that they were involved in partnership organisations at the local level. In one district, for example, the main public sector partnership organisation for all three Providers was the Employment Strategy Group (ESG), a sub-group of the Local Strategic Partnership. The ESG also had locally focused Area Employment Groups, with which all three Providers had linkages. In this locality one of the Providers also had a partnership with the local authority and Jobcentre Plus to provide recruitment support to large scale employment creation opportunities and was deeply embedded in a wide range of local partnership activity on employment. EZ Providers also discussed partnerships with a range of agencies where expertise was needed which was outside of their own provision, including drug and alcohol support agencies, Credit Unions, Housing Benefit staff in local authorities and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Providers.

All EZ Providers placed significant emphasis on their linkages with employers. In some cases, Providers were developing partnerships with local recruitment agencies or were part of a group structure where other arms of the organisation operated as large-scale mainstream employment agencies.

Providers who engaged in outreach work were adopting a number of methods of partnership work to support this, including, for example, a partnership with local schools which included a large proportion of pupils from deprived backgrounds in order to engage lone parents. In another case, a Provider reported working out of the office of a recruitment agency specialising in accessing hard-to-reach clients. One Provider emphasised the importance of good links with community groups in an area with a large South Asian community, in order to support recruitment of clients from this group. However, it was also notable that Providers also found the frequently changing partnership context, with shifting area-based and time-limited funding streams a challenge to engage with, given the demands this made on their resources and the commercial imperatives that they operate under.

Jobcentre Plus respondents, in general, felt that there had been an improvement in the involvement of EZ Providers in relevant partnerships. Good relationships were thought to stem from longer-term relationships (as is the case with the previous single Provider contracts) and from factors such as the number of Provider locations (more locations means more potential for links with Jobcentre Plus offices).

Interaction between EZ Providers and other stakeholders varied considerably, with some having little or no engagement and others engaged in regular and frequent contact. Stakeholders noted the different characteristics and cultures of Providers. Some Providers are seen as more 'commercial'; others as more 'community-focused'. The small number of organisations involved in the study means that it is not possible to identify the characteristics of the different perceived 'types' of Provider. However, two examples illustrate what respondents felt to be 'community-focused' as compared to more 'commercial' approaches:

One of the smaller Providers stressed the importance of community relations and knowledge. This Provider has a Kurdish immigrant on their staff in order to help with dealing with the large Kurdish community – not just for language issues, but in order to help bring understanding of the wider cultural and social issues that are pertinent to Kurdish clients and clients who have had to go through the asylum process, and to help to market the EZ through word-of-mouth.

Another Provider emphasised the way in which their client-centred approach (starting from the aspirations of the clients) includes exploring whether the client's own networks might generate a job outcome.

Some EZ Providers are seen as being more proactive in local partnerships than others. Stakeholders identified tensions and problems as arising from a lack of communication and engagement on the part of EZ Providers, competition and mistrust between the Providers themselves and that commercial motivations and targets, inhibiting the potential for partnership working.

'Communication between us and the EZ Providers is quite poor and we see ourselves as independent – to begin with there was a lot of competition – these systems take time to bed down. A lot of it is interpersonal – you need to develop and build trust. I've tried to work closely with them but it hasn't happened. We expected more collaboration.'

(Local authority officer)

Some stakeholders also noted the impact on other work-based learning, training and support Providers of the MPEZ contracts. One of the EZs, in particular, was seen as 'mopping up' all of the provision contracts and internalizing provision. Competitive pressures were felt to potentially damage the scope for partnership activity to engage employers, especially where EZs were protective over employer relationships. Some stakeholders also felt that competition between EZ Providers at district level could detract from more locally focused activity to target pockets of worklessness, particularly where there was a lack of information flow about the potential for mutuality and additionality between services and interventions developed through different local initiatives and the EZs:

'The EZ Programmes don't fit in. When [EZ] was re-tendered all the EZ Providers came to talk to us about how we could join them – they wanted to work with [us] and they saw transitional employment as an opportunity, but since then we have not seen much of them.'

(Local authority officer)

'We know [Provider] very well. The relationship took a long time to develop and was very difficult at the beginning as they wouldn't co-operate in the way we would like –there were issues about information sharing and [Provider] were not happy with employers being allocated to different Providers, because they were very competitive. In the end our chief executive had a meeting with them and agreed things needed to change and the relationship has changed since then.'

(Local authority officer)

Many stakeholders also identified EZs as contributing to a general sense of local 'initiative overload':

'We are awash with initiatives – the EZ was the first, now Action Teams, there are also various New Deals, plus our own [Council] programmes which seek to plug the gaps. I question the initiative approach and the fact it's so fragmented – isn't it time to do something about this – try and integrate it into a simpler set of programmes? For example the Welfare Reform White Paper proposes city-wide partnerships with better pooling and alignment of funding, better integration of DFES and DWP programmes, and better engagement with employers. We need better harmonization of Jobcentre Plus and the LSCs as well.'

(Councillor, local authority)

2.2.3 Labour market intelligence

The research revealed a variety of approaches amongst EZ Providers to the organisation of labour market intelligence, sourcing of vacancies and submission of clients to job opportunities. Some Providers – especially those working nationwide – utilised a central vacancies team. Many had dedicated staff who search for vacancies and labour market information, build links with employers, undertake research using the web (for instance, sites concerning the local economy), review vacancies in newspapers, and carry out exercises such as retail walks (where staff visit local shops and recruitment agencies). These centralised and formal systems were often augmented by Advisers' own networks and contacts with local employers, built up through previous submissions activity. There were important variations in the extent to which Providers were embedded in local networks with employers. For instance, where a Provider already had a presence in a locality prior to the commencement of MPEZ contracts they tended to be more embedded, with stronger, closer and more stable relationships with employers.

Local partnerships were also seen by EZ Providers as important sources of labour market and vacancy information. For instance, in one locality, Providers were working with the city-wide ESG and its area-based sub-groups. Some Providers used the Jobcentre Plus database of vacancies, but this was not generally a major source of labour market knowledge. In one area, an agreement between the Jobcentre Plus district and the MPEZ Providers sees lists of Jobcentre Plus vacancies not filled within one week being sent through to the Providers. Some Providers though, complained

that they cannot gain direct access to details on the Jobcentre Plus Labour Market System (LMS) about vacancies and must go through a third party.

Jobcentre Plus contributors noted that Providers were in some cases well 'plugged-in' to changes in the local labour market and there was a general feeling that the local labour market knowledge of Providers seems to have markedly improved from the early days of MPEZ, especially for Providers without a prior history of working in that locality. Most Jobcentre Plus Advisers reported regularly answering questions from Providers concerning clients, employers and general local labour market issues, though this had declined in some cases as Providers had become more established:

'I use to share information at the start but used to end up giving them more information than I got out of them – I used to print off the latest vacancies and fax it to them and that went on for seven or eight months...so I thought "let's leave it, I am printing this out for no reason".'

(Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser)

2.2.4 Vacancies and submissions

Employer contact with EZ Providers comes from a range of processes, including cold calling, attending events and personal contacts. Typically, employers deal with one EZ Provider, although there were some examples among employers (especially the larger ones) of dealings with more than one Provider. Most employers deal with both EZ and Jobcentre Plus in relation to vacancies, with some perceived differences between the two; for example, Jobcentre Plus is valued by some employers for its work on job fairs and large-scale recruitment initiatives; EZ is seen by some employers as more flexible and responsive than Jobcentre Plus.

Providers discussed a flexible approach to taking vacancies and making submissions. For instance, there was evidence of adapting the approach to the needs of employers, some of whom prefer a more tailored service based on relationships with specific Advisers and client case loads. Some Providers operated a mixed approach to relationships with employers, with traditional databases of vacancies being used to augment more innovative methods such as direct speculative contact and 'cold calling'. An important feature of some Providers' approaches to submissions activity was that they actively sought a network of employers who they could persuade to 'buy into the welfare to work agenda', so that they could become a sustainable source for submissions.

Relationships with larger employers providing entry level jobs, such as local manufacturers, food and catering companies, the NHS and jobs brokers in the security industry were all seen as important sources of long-term employer-Provider relationships. In these instances, and also in some cases with smaller employers, Providers often provide additional services, such as organising recruitment events, undertaking pre-screening exercises, or undertaking particular types of preparatory work with clients to ensure that they meet the employers' requirements. Where Providers maintained relatively stable networks with employers, they stressed that

this led to enhanced pressure to engage in job matching, so that the quality of that relationship was maintained. There was, thus, a disincentive to submit clients to these jobs without them being job-ready.

In other cases, Providers reported more client-centred submissions processes, and all Providers subscribed, at least rhetorically, to the notion of starting from the basis of a client's aspirations. However, it was less clear that this approach was dominant where Providers had large-scale relationships with a small number of employers.

Where the client aspiration-centred approach did appear to be more embedded, Providers reported that they relied much less on the sourcing of vacancies. In these instances, Provider Advisers would begin from the point of a 'realistic' job aspiration and then target employers offering these jobs and occupational roles. Clients were encouraged to think about their own social networks and how these might be used to secure a job entry close to the aspiration. The logic for this was first that it was perceived to be a highly successful way of achieving job entries and also that the same social networks would help to provide support for the client in sustaining their employment.

Additionally, suitable employers would be identified through searches of business directories for direct approaches through cold calling and in-person approaches by the client with the support of their Adviser. Advisers might, for instance, devote a day to accompanying the client on tours of targeted employers, armed with copies of CVs. Some Advisers also suggested that they steered clients away from the lowest paid or least secure employment.

Even where Providers appeared to have a more traditional emphasis on taking vacancies, they tended to report the importance of gradually involving the client in the submissions process. This was seen as an important means of building the client's independence generally and specifically in relation to the job search process, with the hope that these skills could be used in the future. Indeed, notwithstanding the emphasis in the EZ model on the importance of achieving job entries as the focus of activity, increased capacity for independent job search might be seen as a useful intermediate outcome of the EZ approach.

Providers and Advisers had varying views on the use of employment and recruitment agencies. For some Providers, there are clear organisational links. Respondents from other EZ Providers tended to be critical of making submissions to and through agencies, and highlighted the potential for perverse incentives such as structuring job entries around temporary employment for periods slightly in excess of the 13 weeks. There was also potential for double-benefits for these Providers with one part of the business receiving fees from employers for securing part-time employees, while another part secured fees from the state for finding employment for job seekers.

Where these Providers thought the implication was negative was in the potential effect on clients, and they reported anecdotal and unsupported evidence of discouraged and demoralised clients as the result of feeling let down by their experience of temporary work. Similar anecdotes (again unsupported by other evidence) were offered in relation to clients having been offered employment with Providers themselves. The validity and scale of such activities could not be judged during this research, but there is clear **potential** for such activity to take place.

One Jobcentre Plus contributor discussed the way in which EZs can ‘*do away with some of the forms*’ and the ability they have to pressurise clients to get jobs, including getting them to apply for very large quantities of jobs, whereas the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers (PAs) ‘*have to be sensitive*’. Whilst, generally, discussions of EZ submissions by Jobcentre contributors were positive, there were some ongoing difficulties, for instance:

‘We have got to sell EZ to customers, but people don’t know what they are signing up to. The feedback we get from people is that EZ “better off” calculations are exaggerated – I challenged an EZ and they said that it was the “best case” scenario.’

(Jobcentre Plus Advisers)

Stakeholders held a range of opinions regarding the EZ process through which they make submissions. EZ Providers were felt to have an advantage in being closer in culture to employers than Jobcentre Plus or other partner organisations but some felt that the commercial focus of EZ Providers may hamper strategic development (e.g. the sharing of vacancy information). EZ Providers are seen as in a few instances as specialising in different sectors or types of employers.

2.2.5 Use of external provision

As noted above, a range of external agencies were used by EZ Providers to provide training, for example ESOL, driving, childcare, LGV/HGV training, security training, IT, and construction. External agencies were also used to provide support services, for example, help with debt management and drugs and alcohol dependency. Several Providers noted that there had been quality issues with external Providers, and some now operated clear quality control mechanisms. For example, one Provider was discussing a partnership with a local authority-run employment service to source the best external provision. As a result of concerns with the quality of provision, the use of external provision had, or was, being reviewed with some Providers looking to expand the delivery of in-house provision.

Some Advisers commented that training might be made more important in the EZ ‘offer’ though some thought this would be better provided after a client had started work and as part of an ongoing progression plan. They argued that what employers want in the first instance, is a work history – ‘*they want someone who they know can hold down a job*’. Where provision was being developed in-house, this tended to be in relation to generic work preparation activities such as timekeeping, motivation

and interview preparation. External provision then tended to be of a more specialist nature, such as forklift truck or LGV training, security industry training or care industry training. Providers also used ESOL training provision, but there was no clear pattern in terms of whether this was in-house or external. Some Providers reported developing similar in-house courses to ESOL but with an enhanced focus on work-based language.

Some Providers were worried that without ongoing development once in work, there was a danger of not progressing, becoming disillusioned and stuck in a cycle of entry level work and periodic unemployment. Availability and access to provision and support for clients with the most severe problems was also highlighted as a concern, although use of external provision was widely made. Many clients had mental health, drug or alcohol dependency problems which some contributors felt meant that they should not really be on JSA and were inappropriate for the Employment Zone. Provision for these clients was often more expensive and of a longer-term nature than could be supplied through the EZ.

According to Jobcentre Plus contributors, most Providers appear to have developed a good range of local provision. Details of this provision are often not made available to Jobcentre Plus due to perceptions of 'commercial sensitivity' – although there were also instances where collaboration occurred concerning external provision:

'...a couple of them have very good links with security course provision and it is very well known but it is also very expensive but they have got a contract with them so if anyone wants security work they can pay...'

(EZ Personal Adviser)

Jobcentre Plus contributors did note that some EZ Providers rely more on external provision than others. One district stated that they regretted having no influence over the provision available through the MPEZ, how that provision is used, or what checks are in place to ensure its quality. Another Jobcentre Plus manager suggested that Jobcentre Plus has had access to a wide range of provision but that this had reduced substantially over time:

'What we have been able to deliver in the past has reduced dramatically over the last couple of years and we are now looking to access things like the LSC provision...or to look at other funding streams that aren't necessarily Jobcentre Plus and to make arrangements with other Providers – non-contracted provision.'

2.3 Performance indicators and incentives

There are three main aspects to the operation of performance indicators and incentives in relation to EZs. The first is in relation to EZ Providers' own internal procedures and approaches to motivating their staff. The second is in relation to the distribution of incentives to clients to enter and sustain work. The third relates to the operation of the contract in incentivising the management and organisation of the Providers.

There was no universal trend in the use of internal performance indicators and targets. For example, one Provider focused targets and indicators on the percentage of placement returns, referrals being placed, caseload sizes, time clients spent on the programme and the quality of provision. Another discussed the use of three indicators across the different client groups: individuals coming onto the programme, people entering work, and retention rates. Another set a target for Advisers of one job entry per week. Others used sustainability targets, such as 85 per cent of job entries to be sustained for 13 weeks.

Similarly, Providers operated a variety of different systems in relation to performance incentives. Only a small number of Providers use financial incentives for their own staff. There were mixed views about whether individual targets and performance payments are appropriate and successful motivators. Some EZ contributors thought that these incentivise performance, for example one said that:

'All Advisers are recruited under a bonus scheme that no-one actually understands. Bonuses were supposed to be allocated on a team basis but because we haven't achieved our targets it has been given out ad hoc...we're not doing as well as [other local Providers] because they've got performance-related pay for their Advisers and we haven't. That's why they are way ahead of us...if someone knows they've got a bonus coming they'll do more for the client, won't they?'

(EZ Adviser)

Others thought that the motivating factors for staff were a good atmosphere, autonomy, and supporting people into work – the individual and community impact of this drives performance:

'They are regenerating the community that they live and work in... on a day to day basis the incentive is more about breaking down barriers for people that they have got to know and helping those people into work ...as cheesy as it sounds... I think that's the thing that drives them more than anything else. They are happier when somebody who has been struggling to get into work finds work than if we had just ticked a box to say that we have hit a certain percentage with the contract.'

(EZ manager)

Some Advisers themselves reported that individualised targets, rewards and sanctions were counterproductive and were in tension with the different capabilities of clients. They viewed underperformance as largely the result of some clients being unlikely to sustain employment. It was also felt that overly ambitious targets or instances of not meeting individualised targets could be demotivating.

Some Providers provide incentives to clients to achieve job outcomes and sustainability, such as subsidised/paid-for driving lessons, holidays, washing machines and cash payments. Providers reported that these incentives were used in particular with lone parents. Whilst useful, there appears to be an issue in a few cases of people harvesting incentives by taking part in a number of programmes and not necessarily finishing them or gaining work.

For the most part, respondents thought that the incentives that applied through the EZ contract generally worked well. Because most payments come at the sustained employment stage, the EZ Providers are highly cost-focused. However, a number of problems were also highlighted:

- difficulties concerning the accurate internal performance management of Providers;
- the fees paid to Providers for retaining lone parents might lead Advisers to delay their entry into work;
- the restrictions on in-work payments have made things more difficult, lowering the incentivising effects previously produced by flexible planning;
- there are difficulties with getting the level of evidence needed for verifying job entries, especially for self-employed people;
- the previous bonus system was thought to have had a perverse impact on Providers, meaning that some did not want to take on new clients in the period up to qualifying for the bonus, in order that they could concentrate resources on sustaining existing clients in work. However, this is currently being addressed by the EZ contracts team and efforts are being made to align EZ closer to mainstream New Deal.

Some Jobcentre Plus contributors discussed positively the way in which EZ Providers had contributed to the achievement of Jobcentre Plus targets. The structure of the contract target framework and the balance between the emphasis on job entries and sustainability was thought to be appropriate.

The performance incentives, operational freedoms, level of resources and generally higher rate of pay for EZ Advisers led to some criticisms from Jobcentre Plus staff. Some felt that given a 'level playing field' they could perform equally well, for example:

'...I'm sure if I had the level of resource and flexibility that the Providers do, and could pay my Advisers the same wage, I would do as well, if not better, than the EZ Providers have done.'

(Jobcentre Plus manager)

One group of Advisers suggested that EZ staff only have one job – to get people into work – and that Jobcentre Plus has a range of jobs and targets. Another group of Advisers said that personal relations were good, although they did report tensions over the implications of performance rewards:

'...no matter what help we might give – even sorting out problems for the Providers when they ask for it – all the performance and money goes to the Provider if the client sustains a job.'

(Jobcentre Plus Adviser)

Stakeholders expressed mixed views about the benefits of the performance and incentive systems used by EZ Providers. They noted that the use of targets and incentives could lead to very different organisational cultures and types of service to clients. For instance, one stakeholder suggested that two of the Providers they were aware of were less target-driven, where another was very much more concerned with the achievement of outcome-performance.

2.4 Summary of main points

- For EZ Providers, the most significant change over the past year concerned lone parents, who are now seen as a much more important client group due to altered incentive structures and the extension of lone parent provision outside London.
- Relations between EZ Providers and Jobcentre Plus are generally good, with some scope for improvement in communication in some cases, especially at office level.
- EZs are involved in a range of broader networks and were doing outreach work with a number of partners. Partnership work was reported to have improved overall, although a minority of contributors expressed concerns that competitive pressures limited the scope for partnership activity.
- Employer contact varies, and Providers actively seek a network of employers with whom they could develop sustainable relations and an ongoing source of vacancies. Providers tend to focus primarily on targeting employers in order to meet the 'realistic aspirations' of the clients.
- The incentives that apply to the EZs were generally seen as working well – Providers are cost-focused and address sustainability for the 13-week period and sometimes beyond this, because most payments come at the sustained employment stage.
- The research revealed no universal trend in the use of performance indicators and targets within EZs – both in terms of performance management within the organisations and in terms of the incentives offered to clients. Some Providers offer incentives to clients to achieve job outcomes and sustainability.
- Only a small number offer financial incentives to their own staff. 'Soft' factors such as a good atmosphere were seen as important to staff motivation.

3 Referral processes and practices

3.1 Referral processes and flows – general

EZ Providers reported no major changes to referral processes except a tightening of eligibility for early entrants and a shift away from work with this group, and an increase in the relative importance of lone parents. In some localities there were changes in the type of referral, for instance one Provider described an increase in the number of 18-24 year olds, and clients with English language difficulties.

Most referrals to Providers still come from Jobcentre Plus, but the flows of voluntary referrals of lone parents have increased. A further change is the replacement of the Job Entry Target with the Job Outcome Target system for Jobcentre Plus staff. This was widely thought to be likely to have a positive impact:

'Referral [of Lone Parents] was not working very well as we were forgetting to do it in many cases, as we were too busy and we could not see the benefits to us as it would be very difficult for the PA responsible to claim responsibility for getting the person into work. But from next week we don't have that problem as we will be judging the PAs on the quality of their work not the numbers of people getting into work.'

(Jobcentre Plus manager)

There was some indication of improved communication regarding referral processes, for instance, one Provider said that they report back regularly to their two Jobcentre Plus Advisers regarding referrals and that this helps to build a good relationship, and one Provider reported that:

'We had a problem – they were appearing to fall down a black hole at the Jobcentre Plus. It is improving and the partnership meetings with JCP are helping.'

(EZ manager)

A number of difficulties were reported with referral processes. Providers were critical about the variability of referral flows, which were steady overall but fluctuated over short periods of time. Variability was linked in some cases to changes in Jobcentre Plus offices (for example designated staff being on leave or other Jobcentre Plus staffing problems), or Jobcentre Plus offices moving premises, as well as in some cases relationships between individual Provider Advisers and Jobcentre Plus staff. In one locality all three Providers set up their offices in a specific area and it was difficult to get clients living in other areas to travel to them, although the Providers have now expanded their outreach work to other areas.

Some Providers also criticised the lack of accuracy of referral forecasts. Variations in short-term referral flows and inaccurate forecasts raise challenges for Providers in the planning and management of resources and staffing. Jobcentre Plus managers reported that they understood these problems but reported that there was little that they could do to offset them. There were also concerns that the overall levels of referrals are lower than were initially expected in some districts. The difficulties with lower referrals have meant that in some cases Providers had miscalculated their financial planning on this basis.

Providers also noted an increase in the flows of 'hardest-to-help' clients. This was attributed to two principal causes: The first was the changing nature of the stock of long-term unemployed people which resulted from the tightening labour market over the last decade. This challenge of working with the progressively harder to help has actually increased as labour market demand has slackened over the last year. One Provider discussed difficulties with not being able to market their services to mandatory clients, and being '*at the mercy of the Jobcentre*'. There were also some reported difficulties in how referrals are administered. Sometimes Jobcentre Plus offices refer clients to the Provider office without paying adequate respect to the appointment system operating by the Provider. This undermines the appointment system that is part of the Provider's attempt to secure a transition to 'work-ready behaviour'. Providers also noted some problems arising from the difficulty of establishing eligibility and identifying to which client group a client belongs.

The sanctioning process can cause problems in the referral process and during Stage 1 of the EZ. For instance, when clients do not attend their first EZ appointment they are referred back to Jobcentre Plus for consideration of sanctions, owing to the mandatory nature of participation and attendance. However, the sanctioning process takes time and some Providers reported that this impinged on their capacity to deliver Stage 1 outputs (identification of barriers and production of an Action Plan). They thought that the process could be less rigid and quicker:

'The problem is that where there is to be a sanction – the Providers want it done quickly; it is the clock-stop that is the issue. Resource and staffing issues mean that the clock-stops don't get turnaround as quick as they might.'

(Jobcentre Plus manager)

In one locality, Jobcentre Plus respondents described difficulties with the referral of clients back to Jobcentre Plus for a failure to meet 'Directions'. However, in this instance Jobcentre Plus Advisers were not clear that the client had received any structured 'Directions'. They reported that in a growing number of cases the Provider has been unable to provide details of the 'Direction' the client had failed to meet. The process of referring clients back to Jobcentre Plus could create administrative difficulties for Jobcentre Plus staff and according to these staff it appeared that there was need for increased clarity over the rules and procedures:

'Now I'm getting suspensions and referrals back from [Provider] if the client is sick. Now, if a client is on stage 2, we've got to take their claim all the way back again, then go through all the 'doubt's', whereas they could just get the client to fill out a sickness form and send it to us to input.'

(Jobcentre Plus Adviser)

'EZ can always refer them back to us, so we are seen as the baddies. I have 11 clients on sanctions – I have had one of them since August 2005 and all he gets is Hardship funding – he refuses to go to [Provider] so he gets no benefits, but he claims Hardship every month.'

(Jobcentre Plus Adviser)

3.2 Random allocation processes

A number of EZ Provider respondents described the random allocation process in positive terms. It was seen as practical, logical, fair, and, in some cases, as the best option. However, there were also a range of criticisms made of the process: First, there were concerns in some areas that allocation was neither random nor did it always produce the 'correct' overall distribution of referrals.

Second, the rigidity of the system was criticised. It was felt that where an individual had already been through the EZ with one Provider, they should not be reallocated to the same Provider. Equally, it was also felt that where an individual particularly wants to be referred to a specific Provider, for reasons of reputation, proximity to home or because of the type of support available, that this should be possible. There were also other instances where flexibility would be an advantage, for example placing couples with the same Provider. Overall, it was felt that there should be some possibility to override the random allocation process in specific circumstances. Third, Providers reported that the effect of random allocation was to undermine the potential for specialisation in service delivery on the part of Providers.

Respondents also reported concerns that random allocation may accentuate variations in flows of referrals. Finally, Providers had concerns about the use of random allocation for clients who had been referred back to Jobcentre Plus for failing to attend EZ, rather than simply being re-sent to the same Provider.

The majority of Jobcentre Plus managers interviewed stated that the random allocation of customers to the MPEZ appears to be operating as it should. Views concerning the RAT varied, from it being seen as fair, and useful, to opinions of the tool as bureaucratic, time-consuming and difficult to explain to customers. One positive aspect was that it removed pressure from Jobcentre Plus Advisers to recommend particular Providers to clients. While there had initially been technical problems in the operation of the RAT (as raised in phase one of the evaluation), these had now been resolved:

'In the beginning it was absolutely awful...doing it there and then and it used to take hours on end...but I find it a useful tool because an Adviser doesn't feel obliged through favouritism – if you liked one Provider then all your customers would be going to that same Provider – that can happen.'

(Jobcentre Plus Adviser)

A number of Jobcentre Plus staff reported that some customer feedback about random allocation has been negative for two main reasons. First, there were quite a number of potential early entrants to the MPEZ who requested referral to a particular Provider because of word-of-mouth recommendation but decided against early entry because they would have to be put through the RAT. Second, in cases where a customer, for whatever reason, may need to begin the process of referral to MPEZ again, there have been many instances where these customers have requested a specific Provider and, therefore, been unhappy that they must again be randomly allocated. There were a handful of instances in which this caused serious problems – notably:

'...they can't even change their Provider when there is a personality clash. There was an issue recently with a racist EZ PA and the client was put with a different Adviser after the Jobcentre officer fought for this.'

(Jobcentre Plus Adviser)

There were quite a number of cases where the allocation of Provider did not fit clients' preferences for various reasons, including the location of EZs and proximity to customers' homes.

3.3 Referral of lone parents

Attracting referrals of lone parents was reported by most Providers to be an increasing priority. Many Providers had engaged new staff to perform outreach activity and marketing. Work with lone parents is going well for some Providers. For instance, one Provider began outreach in December 2005 and is pleased with the results, having gained a significant number of referrals and having been able to develop specific programmes to support lone parents based on a similar basis to New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) programmes such as Discovery Weeks which have a heavy emphasis on work taster sessions and mentoring.

As lone parent referrals to the MPEZ are voluntary, many Jobcentre Plus staff mentioned the outreach services that Providers have developed in order to attract and work with clients. Outreach activity involved an increasing presence in Jobcentre Plus offices, establishment of stalls in shopping centres, the development of children's events (with activities and entertainment for children) to attract lone parents and visits to toddlers groups and schools.

In addition to this outreach activity, Providers had taken steps to improve their working relationship with Jobcentre Plus Advisers. For instance, several Providers had been motivated to provide more information to Jobcentre Plus lone parent Advisers about their services, but also about the progress with helping previous referrals. They hoped that this would lead Jobcentre Plus staff to provide more positive messages to lone parents about their services and the opportunities that might flow from them. In most EZ areas, Providers had produced joint publicity for Jobcentre Plus to distribute to lone parent clients. Some Providers felt that there should be a distinction in referrals between lone parents with pre-school and school age children as the latter are much more able to enter work.

A number of approaches had been developed to market services to lone parents, and the importance of ongoing creativity to engage lone parents was discussed. While much of this advertising and outreach activity was thought to be working well, word-of-mouth was felt to be extremely important in attracting lone parent clients. Activities included the following:

- media-based advertising in local newspapers, radio and television;
- outreach work in Jobcentre Plus offices;
- outreach work in '*places where lone parents might congregate*', such as Sure Start, nurseries, local schools, coffee mornings and surgeries (including in local estates);
- use of a mobile home for lone parent outreach events;
- stunts such as a 'fashion on a budget' show for lone parents sponsored by a local supermarket;
- having a mascot;
- publicity via shop fronts and stalls;
- 'recommend a friend' scheme with vouchers;
- organisation of 'fun days' with children's activities.

Competition regarding lone parents was at a nascent stage, particularly outside London, but was clearly present in all districts. In the main, Jobcentre Plus staff did not recommend a particular Provider but distributed the range of publicity about the services offered by the Providers. Only one Jobcentre Plus respondent stated that they have recommended a particular Provider to a client during a Work Focused Interview (WFI). Most other Jobcentre Plus staff stated that, apart from those lone

parents requesting to be referred to a particular Provider because of word-of-mouth recommendation, most customers tended to request the Provider closest to where they live. Little direct opinion was given regarding customer choices between MPEZ and NDLP, although lone parents occasionally switch from NDLP to EZ. One Jobcentre Plus Adviser viewed MPEZs as existing to engage those lone parents not helped by, or attracted to, NDLP. EZs also provide in-kind and cash incentives to lone parents, a practice not adopted by NDLP:

'EZs are there to appeal to people to whom NDLP doesn't. It provides something different, and incentives – some people are having a whale of a time picking up incentives, but at least they are engaged. It gives us more time to work with NDLP.'

(Jobcentre Plus manager)

The research indicated that an EZ is chosen in some cases because of the additional resources that can be marshalled through the EZ. In particular, one group of Jobcentre Plus staff suggested that they were unable to help the increasing number of lone parent clients with English language needs:

'New Deal doesn't have a lot of provision. Nowadays we couldn't even send them to ESOL classes.'

(Jobcentre Plus Adviser)

Little evidence was gained about lone parents switching between EZ and NDLP or switching between EZ Providers, though it was generally felt that the latter would develop. In one case an EZ manager noted that there was some feeling amongst Providers that customers were being offered NDLP at the first WFI and then told about EZs at the second WFI. This manager thought that maybe some Jobcentre Plus Advisers misunderstood the process with the result that the EZ were not getting enough referrals – better communications with Jobcentre Plus advisers should clarify the process. However, in another locality Jobcentre Plus Advisers said that lone parents are offered NDLP or EZ at their WFIs – and that the three EZ Providers each had pros and cons – one being better for more job-ready clients, the other two for the less able clients. This set of Advisers also said that there was competition for lone parents, for example, one of the Providers sitting outside Jobcentre Plus offices trying to 'poach' lone parents from Jobcentre Plus and other Providers as there are 'only so many lone parents to go around'.

Some non-Jobcentre Plus stakeholders thought that the choices between NDLP and the variety of EZ Providers simply served to confuse lone parents, though there was little evidence of this from interviews with lone parent clients themselves.

3.4 Summary of main points

- The research revealed no major changes to referral processes, except for a tightening of eligibility for early entrants and an increase in the importance of lone parents.
- There were reports of an increase in flow of 'hardest-to-help' clients, with the replacement of the Job Entry Target system with Job Outcome Targets within Jobcentre Plus seen by some as having a positive impact. Also, the random allocation process appeared to be operating as it should in the majority of cases.
- Providers had increased outreach work, sometimes using innovative methods, in order to attract lone parents, and there were more voluntary referrals of lone parents than has previously been the case. Competition regarding lone parents was at the nascent stage, and there was little evidence from lone parent clients themselves that they switched Providers or switched between EZ and NDLP.
- Some Providers expressed concern about a perceived lack of accuracy of mandatory referral forecasts, and variability in the flow of referrals in some cases. Also, views about the RAT were mixed, with some contributors criticising the rigidity of the system. There was some limited evidence that early entrants had been put off joining the EZ because of the RAT, and some clients stated that they would have preferred to be able to choose their Provider for various reasons.

4 Provision for different client groups: client, Provider and Jobcentre Plus perspectives

4.1 Introduction

This chapter follows on from Chapter 3, which focused on the referral process, and outlines the experiences and perspectives of different groups of clients, and those working with them. It starts by providing an overview of client experiences of Multiple Provider Employment Zone (MPEZ) provision, then addresses the main client groups referred to Employment Zones (EZs), and goes on to pick up on some of the other (sometimes overlapping) groups. The chapter utilises material from both clients and stakeholders (including EZ Providers and Jobcentre Plus) but the sources of the material are made clear throughout. There is some overlap between findings presented in this and the following chapter, with Chapter 5 drawing out key themes on the provision offered to clients. Both chapters present material from clients first, followed by material from other contributors, broken down by the themes outlined at the start of each chapter.

It is worth noting that employers were not asked to comment on the specifics of different client groups. A number of employers did express an understanding that EZ and Jobcentre Plus had somewhat different client groups (see below), and there was widespread understanding of the differences, across the spectrum, of possible recruits – for instance awareness of the differences between people who want to work and those who do not, and between job-ready people and others. A number of employers said that they thought the client base of the Providers, especially the long-term unemployed, was less than ideal.⁷ A number of employers commented on the difficulties of taking on people who had been out of work for a long time, and on people with English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) issues.

⁷ Two discussed Incapacity Benefit (IB) clients as being less than ideal but this is an error in employers' perceptions as IB clients are ineligible for EZ provision.

Stakeholders were also not asked to comment on the specifics of assisting different client groups. While they generally thought the EZs were making positive contribution to helping the long-term unemployed, they also raised concerns about the potential for categorising clients in terms of job-readiness and likelihood of achievement of fast job entry, and also concerns about submissions to jobs they did not want. They also noted the potential in the system for inappropriate referrals to temporary jobs to claim job entry and sustainability payments.

4.2 Client perspectives: overview

Client respondents were generally positive about the services that they received. They welcomed the help that they received in job search, motivation, CV improvement and interview preparation. Clients also valued the personal support and the time they spent with their Adviser. Several clients also reported receiving behavioural interventions to boost confidence, with one having received the help of a psychologist (although clients did not discuss impacts of behavioural interventions). The help that clients received through the EZs is illustrated by the following quotes:

'[The Provider] have very much helped. They have helped by filling in application forms for me, practising interview techniques on a one-to-one basis with the PA.'

(NDYP returner, Liverpool)

'They gave me a sense of direction and advice on the best ways to search, and I had a structured programme to look for work.'

(Early entrant, Brent/Haringey)

'They helped me with my CV and we did interview techniques training'

(NDYP returner, Birmingham)

'A clothes allowance, travel pass, and they organised work skills training course for me. I found the training of interview skills the most useful as they were what I lacked the most.'

(Lone parent, Glasgow)

Providers offered financial support for the costs associated with attending interviews such as transport and clothing costs. Clients who got a job reported receiving help with transport to work costs and other transitional costs such as clothing, equipment and childcare. This help was also combined with financial assistance during the first weeks and months of employment, for instance to buy food or to pay rent:

'[Provider] provided me with work boots, clothing, a mobile phone and a bus pass which was all helpful.'

(Early entrant, Southwark)

'They helped me with travel costs and childcare fees.'

(Lone parent, Southwark)

'I also received financial support – I was given £500 to buy tools for my new job as an alloy wheel fitter.'

(Early entrant, Brent/Haringey).

'When my JSA stopped [Provider] paid me until I received my first wage. They also paid my travel expenses. Naturally all of this was helpful.'

(NDYP returner, Tower Hamlets).

'I would not have been able to get my current job without their help. They worked with me on a one-to-one basis, and I was given financial support to buy loads for my new job.'

(Early entrant, Brent/Haringey)

'Because it took 6 months to sort out my Working Tax Credits, I didn't receive any Housing Benefit in this time. [Provider] paid my rent for a month and also funded buying materials for my job.'

(Lone Parent, Southwark)

Clients reported a wide variety in the level of activity they undertook in applying for jobs. For instance, some clients reported having made no applications while others reported having submitted over 200 applications for jobs and some others reported submitting an average of 20 applications each week while they were registered. Those who did not submit any job applications while registered with the EZ offered a variety of reasons for this. For instance, some reported that they simply hadn't seen *'any in the paper that I like.'* (NDYP returner, Birmingham). Others thought that their Provider had not done enough to introduce them to vacancies. This was reported as the result of a lack of time or suitable jobs:

'They didn't go through what vacancies were available, they didn't explain the jobs, not enough time – it feels rushed.'

(Lone parent, Southwark)

'[Provider] were unable to find local jobs with hours that suit me - the only ones found were out of town.'

(NDYP returners, Liverpool)

However, the numbers of applications that were successful in being short-listed for interview were much lower. Clients reported that they had received anything from no interviews to having as many as 20 interviews. The majority, though, had been invited to less than five interviews.

Some clients reported receiving help with benefit applications, and the important contribution this made to helping them into work:

'[The Provider] went through what I was entitled to and helped me fill the forms in. I didn't know what I was entitled to before that.'

(Lone parent, Liverpool)

'They sorted my giro out once I had found my job. They gave me £100 in cash and put £100 in my mum's account. They gave me money for a suit. They sorted out me being paid for being a carer to my mum.'

(Early entrant, Birmingham)

'...it was very difficult to sort out my in-work benefits. As soon as you start back to work you lose your Housing Benefits until your Working Tax Credits are approved - this took six months as WTC lost my forms repeatedly. Without [the Provider] I would have given up.'

(Lone parent, Southwark)

In a very small number of cases there were problems with the application for, and payment of, in-work benefits. There were also cases where there appeared to be a confusion of responsibilities between Jobcentre Plus and the Provider:

'Lack of payment - there was a lot of switching blame between Jobcentre Plus and ...[the Provider], each blaming the other. I ended up walking between the offices trying to get it sorted out. I don't think they like each other!'

(Lone parent, Liverpool)

'There was a problem at first with pay slips and application forms getting passed all over the place. I had to sort this out for myself. I was getting my benefit still but it took about two months for the transition to settle down and run smoothly.'

(Lone parent, Southwark)

There was generally much less emphasis on training, lending weight to the work-first and behavioural approach reported by Providers themselves. For example, where training was offered, this tended to be in interview training, basic skills or closely related to a specific job opportunity. A good example of this across several EZs is a short training course leading to the newly required Security Industry Authority accreditation to work in security jobs. In one EZ, one such course was universally mentioned by all Providers as a major referral destination and was operated by an ex-Jobcentre Plus official. Several clients complained about the general lack of support for training and gaining educational qualifications:

'There could have been more training opportunities. All the training was around IT, languages, literacy and numeracy. There were no manual courses or practical training, e.g. finding a forklift training course would have been helpful.'

(Early entrant, Brent/Haringey)

Some clients reported that they felt that the general approach of the Provider had not helped them. For instance, they felt that their specific Adviser was unhelpful, that they were not listened to sufficiently or that the culture or atmosphere was conducive to supporting them into work. Some clients experienced being pushed into any job, regardless of whether it met their aspiration or expectations. Some felt that there was a heavy emphasis on simple job searching, using the internet, newspapers and other places vacancies might be advertised.

More specifically, some clients felt that the office was crowded, or that too much pressure was placed on them to apply for jobs, for example: *'Not pushing people into too much – 20 jobs a day is too much.'* (NDYP returner, Southwark). A minority of clients who had not been helped felt that this was not the fault of the Providers. For instance one client said that *'I don't think they could have done much more. I'm just a nervous person.'* (NDYP returner, Brent/Haringey). Complaints related to a lack of training provision, a failure to provide the sorts of interventions that other clients had received (help with CV, interview preparation or in-work benefits), or a lack of crèches or play facilities for children:

'By the time I left (Feb 2005 when I was referred back to Jobcentre Plus) it was very crowded, maybe they need to expand? Computers were quite scarce, only a few towards the end. They could do with a couple of more popular newspapers – there weren't enough to go around.'

(NDYP returner, Southwark)

'Not really [it did not really help]. It was just put down in an Action Plan. I can do the same thing at home, i.e. job search on the internet.' (Client's response when asked if they had discussed ways of achieving the job goals with their Adviser)

(Lone parent, Brent/Haringey)

'I think that they just go through the motions. I really wanted work and they never really helped me – I'm being honest. When you're in your 40s and 50s they look at you differently. They just have jobs on the wall and you can do the same in the Jobcentre.'

(Early entrant, Birmingham)

There was no clear pattern of response to whether the EZ had met clients' expectations overall. Many clients reported that they had not really had any preconceived ideas about the EZ. The rest were roughly split between those that said

that it had exceeded their expectations and those that were disappointed. Some were surprised by the level of intensive job search activity or the types of support the Providers were able to offer, particularly in making the transition to work: *'No, it was much better than I expected. I never thought I'd get the level of support I did, the financial assistance or the training.'* (Lone parent, Glasgow). Others were clearly disappointed with their failure to secure a job through participation on the EZ, the level of support available, or the types of contacts and networks that the Providers were able to access:

'No, it wasn't what I expected it to be. I thought I would be able to get a job easily if I started with ... [the Provider].'

(NDYP returner, Brent/Haringey)

'I expected more help from [Provider]. I thought they ran short courses on confidence building.'

(Lone parent, Glasgow)

'I expected more - I thought [the Provider]... would have direct contacts with suitable employers in specific areas of business to make finding the right job easier. I also expected work placements but didn't get one.'

(Lone parent, Glasgow)

Clients made a number of suggestions for improvement, including the following:

'Perhaps if the PAs could spend more time with their clients it would help, as they could then find out more about what you wanted to get out of the programme.'

(NDYP returner, Glasgow)

'There should be a confidence building programme – role play situations – to see where you are going wrong in interviews. They should ask questions about how you feel about job search, what you feel are your issues. Pinpoint your issues regarding social skills, form filling, then do something about it and give you practice.'

(Lone parent, Southwark)

'The timing and appointments. They should have had childcare and play facilities.'

(Lone parent, Brent/Haringey)

4.3 Provider and Jobcentre Plus perspectives: overview

The flexibility awarded to Providers under the MPEZ contracts was broadly recognised and understood by Jobcentre Plus respondents. Some Jobcentre Plus respondents also thought that the use of dedicated in-work Advisers by some Providers had been helpful. Overall, it seemed that the contract gives a sharp focus on getting people into sustainable work – engaging customers in the right kind of job, one which they will stay in. Many Jobcentre Plus Advisers spoke of the potential benefits that such an approach could bring to long-term unemployed customers; some expressed regret that a similar degree of flexibility could not be adopted by Jobcentre Plus, for example:

'To some extent the Providers can offer payments to people to overcome any difficulties that they have got, we can do that to a certain degree with our funding as well but theirs is a bit more open-ended and easier to access than our own. Sometimes they will go to quite a lot of expense on one individual which is then offset by the people they don't have to spend so much on and we don't have that kind of flexibility.'

(Jobcentre Plus manager)

Some Jobcentre Plus Advisers reported that they perceived that customers are at times more honest and open with Providers in revealing their personal or family-centred barriers to work than they had previously been with Jobcentre Plus. However, Jobcentre Plus staff also had concerns about the quality of services offered to some clients through some EZ Providers. For instance, they raised concerns that some Providers did not provide enough of a focus on training and were overly motivated by job entries. This meant that they may exert excessive pressure on clients to take jobs they were not suited for or to provide insufficient support to overcome barriers to employment in any fundamental way.

Many Providers reported that they undertook in-work benefit calculations and help to apply for in-work benefits. Problems and delays with the administration of in-work benefits were thought to be a challenge for sustaining clients' employment. The flexibility to be able to plan financial payments in the first month of employment to ensure that there are no problems associated with non- or late-payment of in-work benefits or by paying rent, clothing and travel expenses, were all thought to be important in ensuring clients did not drop out of work. Some Providers stressed the importance of persuading employers to buy-in to the 'Welfare to Work agenda', and where this was possible, mutual support between the Provider and employer was effective. Contact and communication with the employer was also more possible in this instance.

Generally, Jobcentre Plus respondents were not aware of the detail of in-work support available through EZ Providers and could not comprehensively assess 'what works' in this regard. However, several did mention in-work financial support to cover the transition into work as an important area in which EZs can help clients in ways that Jobcentre Plus cannot, especially since the reductions in the level of support possible through the Adviser Discretionary Fund.

'They can do bus passes, food parcels, they paid rent for one of my clients, they paid for his expenses in America to get established in the music industry there...they can support them for three months after, again the financial incentive you can appreciate from the customer's point of view – they are on very little money and then getting into work and having to pay rent suddenly from your own pocket – it is a big change.'

(Jobcentre Plus Adviser)

Where employers discussed in-work support, it was seen as positive. EZ Providers were described as *'dropping in'*, phoning up regularly to see how new recruits were getting on, and so on. However, there may be room for improvement in educating employers about the support needs of the long-term unemployed entering work and in the quality of in-work support offered.

There has been some comment in the past about the potential in welfare to work programmes with outcome-based performance incentives to accentuate *'creaming'* and *'parking'* with the most job ready being singled out for attention while others with more profound needs are ignored (Le Grand and Bartlett, 1993). This criticism has been levelled specifically at EZs (TUC, 2003), with previous qualitative evaluations providing some poorly substantiated evidence in support of this (Hirst et al., 2002).

This research revealed some evidence of a minority of Providers separating clients who they thought had the potential to get a job and those that they thought were less likely to do so. For instance, one Provider had a *'traffic light'* system with those least likely to access work being categorised as *'red'*. Another Provider conducted an initial assessment of clients' ability to find paid work and sent those that were less likely to find work to external provision. In these cases, the Provider did not specify that they effectively *'parked'* these clients but the status of work-focused support that they received was unclear.

Some Jobcentre Plus staff raised concerns that harder-to-help clients were being *'parked'* by some Providers. However, there was very little actual evidence from the qualitative research of *'creaming'* or *'parking'* – the only real evidence came from one client who felt that they had been left without assistance because they were older.

4.4 Lone parent experiences of MPEZ provision⁸

Lone parents received a variety of different types of support from Providers. However, in most cases this did not vary from the general type of support received by all client groups. For instance, clients reported receiving help with the financial costs of attending interviews and travelling to work in the transitional period. They also received financial help to buy work clothes and to bridge the potential financial gap between ending benefits and starting to receive wages. Lone parents also reported

⁸ This section concentrates on clients' experiences post-referral. Chapter 3 set out the key findings in relation to the referral of lone parents to EZ Providers.

receiving help with in-work benefits and receiving financial incentives to gain and stay in work. Childcare featured amongst the help received but, based only on client interviews, was not widespread.

Clients had become aware of the Provider through advertisements in the local media, shopping centres or through seeing the Providers' shop front. Others had received a personal recommendation from a friend or heard about the Provider through 'word-of-mouth':

'I wasn't referred and so didn't have a choice - I went there on my own. I was in [area] shopping so saw [the Provider]..., and went in and found out about it. I went in and made an appointment [for another of the Provider's offices]... I didn't know that there was any other choice or programme.'

(Lone parent, London)

'[The Provider]... advertised in the paper. Rang up and made an appointment to see them. Advertising if it would benefit you to go back to work. Explained about programme but don't remember anyone saying how long it would be for.'

(Lone parent, Liverpool).

'...I had heard from friends and advertising that they could help lone parents into work. I stayed with [Provider] and didn't register with any other.'

(Lone parent, Glasgow)

Choice was also impacted on by additional factors. While the level and types of service offered by Providers were not mentioned widely as influencing choice, there were cases where this was the case. Location was also a factor in some instances:

'Referred self onto [Provider] because I was aware they did a small business plan. I'm not with them because I went back to university.'

(Lone parent, Tower Hamlets)

'Jobcentre Plus told me about other programmes but I chose [Provider] because it was nearest to my home. I stayed with [Provider] because I had a very nice Adviser. He was lovely to me. At first I was scared, I had no place to live and he got me out of my shell.'

(Lone parent, Brent/Haringey)

In a small number of cases, considerations of the quality of service had led lone parents to change their Provider, offering some small amount of evidence that market-based choice is in operation:

'It was discussed at Jobcentre Plus. I was advised to go to [Provider 1] and told what: the programme involved. I registered with [Provider 1] as I felt this would be useful. I was also told about NDLP. I changed to [Provider 2] from [Provider 1] as I was not happy with the service.'

(Lone parent, Tower Hamlets)

Most lone parents were aware of the choices available to them. Nevertheless, there were examples of clients who felt that they were not given a choice and that referral from Jobcentre Plus and allocation to a specific Provider had been mandatory. While some had been referred to the EZ Provider through Jobcentre Plus, many had self-referred. Where this was the case, choice was not always understood, because there had been no opportunity for Jobcentre Plus to inform them.

Lone parents mentioned a number of specific barriers that they perceived to be preventing them from entering work. Access to affordable childcare was very prominent among these, as was the lack of availability of jobs that fit with school hours. However, other factors were also mentioned: For example, some clients reported that a lack of motivation or confidence held them back. Others reported that they lacked skills associated with the job applications process or work-related skills. Some lone parent clients also reported fears about the potential loss of income from benefits once they entered work as a perceived barrier. Other barriers identified included a lack of work experience, or a lack of specific work-based qualifications such as a forklift license. Some lone parents also reported that they perceived employers to be risk-averse to employing them as a result of concerns of their commitment to a job in relation to their family responsibilities:

'Childcare issues. It costs a lot of money to use a nursery and finding suitable working hours is difficult. You need to be earning a certain amount of money before you can afford to put your child into care.'

(Lone parent, Brent/Haringey)

'Childcare – need after-school club. The hours – to fit in with school.'

(Lone parent, Liverpool)

'Childcare costs are expensive, also I lack motivation and confidence about going back to work after some time out.'

(Lone parent, Brent/Haringey)

'Lack of confidence and certain skills...[for example] ...I.T. due to time out of market.'

(Lone parent, Liverpool)

'Because I had two small children, employers didn't want to set me on. They thought it would be too much for me, even though I would have worked any hours. I had too many rejections.'

(Lone parent, Southwark)

4.5 Provision for lone parents: Provider and Jobcentre Plus perspectives

Most Providers had begun marketing specifically designed to attract lone parents and many were pleased with the results of this (see the section on referrals). Marketing approaches included media-based advertising in local newspapers and even on television, and outreach work in Jobcentre Plus offices and in *'places where lone parents might congregate'*, such as Sure Start and other centres (see above). Providers had also arranged 'fun days' with children's activities as well as other advice for lone parents to market their services.

Jobcentre Plus made lone parents aware of EZs in the Work Focused Interviews (WFIs), but there was also at least one instance in which EZ Providers visited Jobcentre Plus offices to tell lone parents about their services, and another in which a Provider set up a stall outside a Jobcentre Plus office without permission, for recruitment purposes.

Increased feedback to Jobcentre Plus lone parent Advisers was being undertaken to try to promote the communication of positive stories about the experiences of previous clients. The importance of help with benefit calculations and also with initial childcare costs was discussed. The impact of changed funding arrangements was also discussed by Providers. The engagement payment system for lone parents is currently being reviewed by the EZ contracts team, and policy may be revised. A view expressed by one Provider (not one more generally held) is that:

'...in terms of interim payments it's encouraged us to take tighter control over the amount of times we engage with people. There is increased pay for retention. Our way of working has improved now that our Retention Assistant is in place.'

There were some issues relating to working with lone parents that Providers were addressing, including the need for a flexible approach, a range of training provision, accommodating children on site, and the Health and Safety issues faced concerning the latter. Accommodating children on site and ensuring that children were kept separate from the mainstream parts of the office were concerns for Providers, who were worried about the inappropriate behaviour of some clients being witnessed by children.

Some Providers reported that they often retain contact with clients long after the 'official' 13-week period. Providers also noted that because of the need to build confidence and address barriers, lone parents may, realistically, take longer than the 26-week period to become 'job-ready'. Some Providers noted the benefits of

working with lone parents, for instance one contributor said that lone parents are usually very easy to work with as they tend to be motivated, and many are clear about their perceived direction and abilities.

Innovative practice on the part of the Providers includes, in one case, where a Provider who has gone to great lengths to serve a large local Bengali community. They discussed the stigma of lone parenthood within the Bengali community and the need to adopt careful approaches with this client group – single parents in that community tend to expect no help and would not seek any for risk of publicising their situation to the wider community.

Providers perceived the challenges of working with lone parents to be:

- helping with childcare arrangements and covering initial childcare costs. Helping with transitional issues, such as purchasing clothes, initial transport to work, or paying rent during the first month's employment;
- awareness about proximity of jobs to childcare and to clients' homes, and appropriate hours of work are important issues for lone parents;
- good links with external agencies such as Gingerbread help with lone parent support;
- a longer time away from the labour market was an issue for some lone parents, and issues of confidence have to be addressed in some cases;
- some Advisers reported that regular contact can be difficult with lone parents for all the reasons that entering work is difficult. In these instances, they felt that some additional flexibility to count engagement as telephone contact in place of simple attendance at the office.

The majority of Jobcentre Plus staff interviewed mentioned the tangible improvement in Provider activities regarding lone parents, since the amendments to the MPEZ contracts were made in November 2005. Providers have, in the main, become attuned to the needs and issues of lone parents in relation to sustaining work and most Jobcentre Plus respondents mentioned that they have seen evidence of Providers working to forge good links with relevant local groups and agencies working with lone parents.

Initial concerns from Jobcentre Plus Advisers that Providers might concentrate on 'quick wins' at the expense of sustainable outcomes for clients have in some cases been allayed, and evidence seems to show that Providers have adapted their services and training to deal with lone parents. The benefits of in-work support, particularly help with transitional costs were specifically highlighted as successful. In several localities, Providers had adopted similar interventions to those in the Jobcentre Plus Discovery Weeks, and were focusing on a combination of work 'tasters' and mentoring.

Some Jobcentre Plus Advisers criticised the approaches of EZ Providers toward lone parents, feeling that they are only really interested in dealing with customers who

are job-ready and there is a lack of emphasis on training provision (it is important to point out that these were Jobcentre Plus staff perceptions and they do not necessarily reflect actual engagement with lone parents by Providers):

*'Jobcentre Plus is looking at employment **and** training where as the EZ is a quick fix, getting people into jobs in the least possible time in order to maximise return.'*

'We find quite often that if a referral says they're not looking for work, the Providers are immediately ready to refer them back to us [Jobcentre Plus]. But surely they should be seeking to challenge that situation and encourage their clients to break down the barriers to work they might have. We refer them because we're led to believe that the Providers offer flexible but intense one-to-one support.'

4.6 NDYP returners' experiences of MPEZ provision

NDYP returners were largely happy that the referral process was explained to them appropriately. They were aware of the process, the role of random allocation and the majority were aware of the mandatory nature of the programme.

However, a small number of these client respondents appeared to think that they had been given the choice of whether to attend and which Provider to register with:

'I'd been signing on for so long they said I'd been referred to [Provider 1]. I had the choice between [Provider 1] and [Provider 2], and I chose [Provider 1]. Everything was explained to me at [Provider 1].'

(NDYP returner, Birmingham)

'Was invited to a meeting at the Jobcentre, where I had [Provider] and their activities explained to me. I was told it was my decision of whether to join [Provider 1] or not. I had that choice and decided to go. I felt that everything was adequately explained at the time.'

(NDYP returner, Liverpool).

Clients from the 18-24 year old client group reported similar barriers to work to other groups. The main area of variation was the emphasis on a lack of work experience. Other perceived barriers were a lack of transport, a lack of confidence or motivational problems. NDYP returners also reported that a lack of basic skills, a lack of qualifications or a criminal record held them back.

The types of support received by NDYP returners again largely mirrored that received by other client groups. This included financial assistance with transport and other costs associated with interviews. NDYP returners also received help with transitional costs in entering employment such as travel to work costs, new clothing and equipment. However, there did appear to be a greater emphasis with this group on the use of work placement and volunteering opportunities as a means of building relevant work experience:

'Had been on New Deal and tried to restart on that but was told I would have to go to [Provider]. Jobcentre Plus explained what it was all about, got me to sign a form and sent me to [Provider]. That part of it was fine'

(NDYP returner, Brent/Haringey)

'I got a clothing allowance, travel allowance, and a 13 week course of training on the job in a work placement, which was like working a trial period with a company.'

(NDYP returner, Glasgow)

'I got a clothing allowance, travel allowance, and a job (of sorts) working for the City Council doing landscaping work - this was the most useful as it gives me relevant work experience.'

(NDYP returner, Glasgow)

While on Stage 2 of the EZ process, the EZ Provider pays the client's benefits entitlement. 18-24 year old clients were asked if they had experienced any problems with the administration and payment of their benefits during Stage 2. The vast majority reported that they had not experienced any problems. However, a small minority had experienced problems. The types of problems encountered were usually missing or late payments. In some instances it was not clear that the problem was with the Provider rather than with the client's bank account or, in one case, a client reported that their benefits cheque had been stolen.

4.7 Provision for NDYP returners⁹: Provider and Jobcentre Plus perspectives

Some Provider respondents saw NDYP returners as being more receptive to EZ provision, and more flexible than older clients. One contributor discussed NDYP returners as having a high placement rate but noted that retention rates tend to be much lower. Although this is a perception based on qualitative evidence, and not a reflection of performance based on administrative data, similar views were expressed by a number of contributors.

Providers identified a number of barriers to employment experienced by NDYP returners. Young people may be perceived by employers as having limited experience, limited enthusiasm, and being unreliable. NDYP returners did face some specific

⁹ It is important to reiterate at this point that the discussion in this report relates to NDYP returners who, by definition, have difficulty sustaining work, rather than young people more generally. Throughout this section, the term 'NDYP returner' is used, although some respondents used the term 'young people' and this term is used in direct quotes.

barriers, such as the failure to qualify for in-work benefits meaning that the benefits trap (particularly in relation to Housing Benefit) remained a problem. In a number of cases, NDYP returners are not much better off in work than on Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) – they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit and so need to earn more to make work an attractive option.

In addition, one Provider discussed the stigma attached to low-wage jobs as acting as a disincentive. Also, some NDYP returners faced barriers to work because of drug and/or alcohol dependency. Providers had responded to these, developing links with external Providers. Some Provider respondents also noted that young people often lived at home with their family and had less pressure to be financially independent – and in some cases there was parental pressure to avoid work, especially in second and third generation unemployed households and communities. Taken together, these pressures could mean that young clients did not have a 'work-first' attitude:

'Some young people have got their priorities muddled up. For example one client won't take a job that involves Saturday working because they have a season ticket for the football. Night time work and weekend work are expected of younger people but many don't want to do it because it bites into their social life...there is no generational work ethic and young people rely on parents for money and so on. There is a lack of appreciation of what work involves – it means a big lifestyle change.'

'Many are third generation unemployed and don't see why they should work. If you get pregnant you get a flat. We educate them – if you can prove to them that breaking the mould could lead to a better life – we use role models, show them the benefits. They can take a survival job and train up. This is also applicable to older people. A lot of young people don't know what they want to do so we have to educate them about what they enjoy doing.'

It was generally thought that motivational interventions were required to tackle NDYP returners' perceived negative attitude to work and issues like time keeping. Some of these problems meant that while they are often quite easy to get into a job, they fail to sustain it. Peer group interventions were thought, by some, to be more appropriate to the needs of NDYP returners, especially where this was able to offer a new peer group support structure with different cultural and social approaches to work. Younger Advisers were also thought by some to be better able to establish a rapport with younger clients. One of the contributors discussed the need to emphasise peripheral and developmental aspects of employment as an incentive, given the limited financial rewards in some cases. Providers discussed the positive aspects of EZ for NDYP returners, including the practical advice and support that is offered, and help with literacy and numeracy, and help with confidence building.

Some Jobcentre Plus respondents were critical of the lack of training available to NDYP returners through the EZ. They drew attention to the previous focus of NDYP upon skills and training, as well as the financial incentives that could be made to

employers to offer training to young employees. These criticisms notwithstanding, Jobcentre Plus respondents were largely unaware of specific EZ initiatives that focus upon young clients. Although one contributor noted that EZ Providers seem able to get 18-24 returners into work, it was unclear how this was achieved or how sustainable these job entries were. Another Adviser felt that New Deal was better for young people than EZ, because young people are pressurised to take a job when they join EZ, whereas New Deal addresses skills and there is a financial incentive to employers, for also putting young people into training.

4.8 Early entrants' experiences of MPEZ provision

Early entrants reported receiving a similar mix of help and assistance to other clients from the Providers. This included help with interview skills, financial assistance for travel to interviews and to the workplace once in work. They also received financial support to buy clothing and equipment when they had entered work and support with making applications for in-work benefits.

Early entrants were much more likely than other client groups to report that they did not understand the referral process. Many early entrants reported that they did not feel that they had a choice over whether or not they entered the EZ. Many also felt that the process had not been fully explained to them and particularly that they had not been made aware that participation was mandatory once they had joined the EZ. As such, there was a degree of dissatisfaction and frustration among this client group at the referrals and allocation process.

As with NDYP returners, early entrants receive their benefit payments from the EZ Provider. Again, as with NDYP returners, the majority of clients reported that they experienced no problems with this. Again though, a small minority of clients in this group did report some problems. These were largely delays to benefits payments and appeared to relate to the transition in responsibility from Jobcentre Plus to the Provider.

'The Jobcentre transferred my JSA payments to [Provider]. There was one problem – the full payment did not reach my bank account on one occasion, and it took a week to rectify.'

(Early entrant, Brent/Haringey)

Early entrants' perceived barriers to employment were not vastly different than for other groups. However, there was a slightly increased emphasis on health-related problems, mental health problems and some instances of skills mismatches with quite highly skilled individuals being unable to find employment at the same level as previously.

4.9 Provision for early entrants: Provider and Jobcentre Plus perspectives

A wide range of clients are eligible for early entry to an EZ (see Appendix A). These include disabled people, people with basic skills or language needs, ex-offenders and clients with drug problems. While there had initially been a high emphasis on persuading potential early entrants to join EZ, budgetary constraints meant that this was no longer the case. For example, a group of EZ Advisers said that early entrants '*have more or less gone*' because the budget has been reined in – at this EZ Provider, early entry only occurred in exceptional circumstances.

One Adviser noted that the Random Allocation Tool (RAT) was negatively affecting potential early entrants, who declined early entry once they find out that they could not go to the Provider recommended by friends or family. This view was echoed by a number of other contributors, although it would not be possible to say that it was a generally held view. Overall, EZs were seen as being different to Jobcentre Plus in their approach to early entrants due to their need for clients to satisfy eligibility criteria in order to volunteer for the programme and the fact that EZ Providers have more resources than Jobcentre Plus to tackle their barriers to work.

There was some limited evidence of innovative working practices in relation to early entrants. For instance, one Provider had an office in an area with a large Kurdish community. They had employed a Kurdish Adviser who not only could communicate with the flow of referrals from the community but understood their experiences as recent immigrants to the UK and the important cultural and social characteristics of the community. One Provider discussed language issues and the need for extra training for work with early entrants. This Provider is moving towards providing in-house work-focused English courses which are similar to ESOL as a result of concerns over the quality of external ESOL provision.

4.10 Other client groups: Provider and Jobcentre Plus perspectives

Customer interviews focused on NDYP returners, lone parents and early entrants. However, Provider and Jobcentre Plus respondents offered a number of observations on other specific sub-groups of customers:

- **Over 50s:** were thought to require interventions designed to build self confidence, motivation and self-esteem.
- **25+ clients:** Some Providers thought that the 25+ age group of clients were increasingly harder to help, as a result of the expanding economy over recent years as well as the impact of Welfare to Work programmes, including EZs. They were described as a 'shallower pool' consisting mostly of people who are very long-term unemployed. However, 25 plus clients were thought to be harder to get into work than younger clients but once in work retention rates tended to be higher.

- **Most disadvantaged (or 'hardest-to-help') clients:** Dealing with the clients with severe difficulties, such as a serious lack of basic skills, language, mental health and drug or alcohol dependency problems, was a challenge for EZ Providers. These clients were felt to be different to 'standard' EZ clients who are already 'harder to help', but able to enter work with advice and support.¹⁰ Providers had contracted with specialist alcohol or drug dependency support and in some cases, had engaged psychologists or behavioural experts (using Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, which has helped some clients with lower-level behavioural disorders, *'emphasising an action-oriented, forward looking approach that does not look at reasons for behaviours but rather at putting practical solutions in place'* (EZ Adviser)). Providers reported that there was scope to cross-subsidise between clients to help meet the additional costs incurred in such intensive support. While it was thought that it was possible to help some members of these most disadvantaged groups, it was also widely commented that EZs may not provide the most suitable support. Some commented that they were surprised that these had not been picked up by Jobcentre Plus and others thought this was the result of declining Jobcentre Plus budgets. It was suggested that interventions to deal with the most severe problems might be more appropriate prior to joining an EZ. Some problems were thought to be too severe to be dealt with as part of a process of moving into employment and required medical intervention.
- **ESOL clients:** Dealing with English language problems was often difficult because ESOL or other courses are not necessarily tailored to providing work-related language. Some Providers had tackled this by adapting their own provision which was similar to ESOL but more employment oriented.

4.11 Summary of main points

- Employers and stakeholders were not asked to comment on the specifics of different client groups. However, a number of employers discussed difficulties associated with taking on long-term unemployed people. Stakeholders generally thought that the EZ Providers were making a positive contribution to helping the long-term unemployed, but some concerns were raised about the potential for categorising clients according to job readiness and submissions to jobs that clients did not want or that may be unsuitable.
- Clients were generally positive about the services they received from EZ Providers. Help included support with identifying directions and confidence building, practical help with CVs, application forms and interview skills, training courses (although there was less emphasis on this), financial support and help with benefits.

¹⁰ Although the distinction might be difficult to make in some cases, for example recurring lower-level mental health problems requiring ongoing management/support.

- Clients' levels of job-seeking activity vary quite widely. A minority of clients reported that the EZ had not helped them, due to insufficient support from their Adviser, a lack of computer or other resources, insufficient training opportunities, or being pushed into jobs or directions that did not fit their needs or interests.
- EZ Providers and Jobcentre Plus respondents broadly recognised the value of the flexible and well-resourced approach taken by EZ Providers, including the focus on job sustainability. There was some evidence of categorisation of clients according to job-readiness. The usefulness of the in-work support offered by EZ Providers was acknowledged.

Comments specific to the different client groups were as follows:

- **Lone parents** discussed the barriers they face, particularly difficulties with managing affordable childcare, a lack of confidence or in some cases, experiences of prejudice due to status. Providers emphasised the importance of a flexible approach, help regarding childcare, the need for training provision, and the need to accommodate children on site (including Health and Safety issues). In a small number of cases lone parents reported changing their Provider due to concerns about quality of service.
- **NDYP returners:** The help received by NDYP returners was similar to that provided to other groups. There did appear to be more emphasis on work placements and training amongst this group. The main barriers to work identified by NDYP returners and EZ Providers/Jobcentre Plus contributors were similar to those of other groups, but a lack of work experience was emphasised, and transport issues, lack of confidence, and motivational issues were also discussed. There was anecdotal evidence of NDYP returners being more receptive to MPEZ than other mandatory clients, but as having lower retention rates once they started work. A minority of NDYP returners had experienced problems with benefits during their time with the EZ. Some Jobcentre Plus contributors felt that there were limited training opportunities for NDYP returners under MPEZ.
- **Early entrants:** The experiences and reports about early entrants were similar to those of other groups, except that they were much more likely to report that they did not understand the referral process, and there was some evidence that the RAT acted as a deterrent from entry onto EZ. There was some evidence of innovative working practices in relation to early entrants.
- **Most disadvantaged clients:** Dealing with those with the most severe problems was seen as a challenge for EZ Providers, some of whom had contracted with specialist alcohol or drug dependency support or other specialist help. Whilst it was thought possible to help some members of this group, it was also widely commented that EZ may not be the most suitable support. Some Providers thought that 25+ clients were increasingly harder to help.
- **Other:** ESOL clients had specific needs which Providers were seeking to meet, for example, through adapting their own provision. Older people were seen as needing interventions to build self-confidence and motivation.

5 Provision for different client groups: key themes

This section draws out key themes concerning client experiences and the experiences of those working with them. It is broken down into the following sections: success factors, innovation, action planning, choice, barriers to work, client job aspirations and outcomes, sustainability, labour market outcomes and non-labour market outcomes.

5.1 Success factors

Generally, most clients were happy that Providers had done all that they could to support them into work. Clients valued a wide range of the overall Employment Zone (EZ) offer. The organisational culture and the atmosphere in the Provider offices were welcomed by some clients who found these relaxing and conducive. In a similar vein, clients also reported that they valued the individualised service, the approach of their Adviser and the time that they were able to spend with their Adviser in an attempt to move closer to employment.

'It was a friendly atmosphere. Everyone had their own desk and your conversation was private, with no one listening in. It was well organised i.e. when you attended your appointment they had prepared a list of jobs for you to consider.'

(Lone parent, Brent/Haringey)

'It brought me out of my shell. My Adviser went around town with me to give out CVs. I found this very supportive. They calculated my in work and out of work financial positions which was very useful.'

(Lone parent, Birmingham)

'There was a lot of encouragement to do with job prospects. Being treated as an individual person and treated well in general is a very positive thing. One-to-one relationship and atmosphere is better than Jobcentre.'

(Early entrant, Glasgow)

'Getting the starting work bonus, and giving me inspiration and offering me the chance to ring employers. They were also going to pay for tools, giving me financial help if needed.'

(NDYP returner, Southwark)

Other clients reported that they valued the facilities available in the Provider's offices. For instance, they identified the availability of computers with internet access, telephones and vacancy information. Clients suggested specific aspects of the service were particularly valued, such as financial assistance to support the transition to work or help with job search and applications and motivation:

'Access to internet, looking for jobs, calling up organisations, using their facilities.'

(Lone parent, Southwark)

'They help you fill in application forms and how to look for work like looking through papers and on the internet.'

(NDYP returner, Brent/Haringey)

'Financial help with clothing helps when you are receiving Income Support.'

(Lone parent, Birmingham)

Generally, Providers thought that the key factors in securing a job outcome across the different client groups were:

- regular contact (for example three times per week);
- clients sharing the financial benefits;
- client-appropriate help (for instance where relevant working with family friendly employers);
- respectfully challenging client's assumptions and perceived barriers to work;
- going 'the extra mile' where necessary;
- having the flexibility to tailor support to the needs of individual clients;
- provision of a friendly but business-like and efficient environment.

In addition, some Providers were committed to building wider community links as opposed to just individual links with the client. They thought this not only helped them to become an automatic choice for those customers where this is relevant, but

also to understand the specific and real (as opposed to espoused) barriers to work. This understanding could then be put to use in tailoring interventions to help individual clients, particularly in challenging negative attitudes to work. Sensitivity to local issues and good links with communities were considered to be crucial by some Providers. For example, in one locality, Providers discussed local gang culture and the importance of knowledge of this: they organised a recruitment event and another Provider brought young people from a different locality; there was violence and the Police were called. It was felt that increased local knowledge could have made this avoidable.

A general theme was the importance of building clients' self-confidence and autonomy, ultimately helping them to apply for jobs independently. This was thought to increase the likelihood of people staying in work (see Section 5.7). Overall, Providers stressed the importance of individualised methods, for instance:

'The methods differ according to client group. We work with people who have profound barriers to employment. For example, with ex-offenders we will look at how the offending behaviour happened, and do a target search where they can disclose to employers who will recruit from this client base. For example the Third Age Network is seen as a resource [for older clients], and we educate employers about family-friendly employment. We do a whole host of things.'

Providers emphasised the importance of challenging attitudes and assumptions about work that might be held by individuals but were often part of a broader culture of worklessness:

'It is about getting them to face the issues they've got and tackling these. Engaging, getting their trust, and working with them to overcome the barriers. A lot of them are from very disadvantaged groups where work isn't a part of their life or their family's lives, going back one or two generations.'

(EZ Adviser)

5.2 Innovation

Clients provided evidence of innovative support. For instance, one client reported being referred to a more specialised business advisory service and another reported that they received financial help toward advertising a new gardening business. However, some other clients reported frustrations that they had not been helped to start their own business.

EZ and Jobcentre Plus contributors offered a number of examples of innovation and flexibility regarding service provision. Some Providers varied opening hours to suit in-work clients, and others discussed the benefits of flexibility and autonomy amongst Advisers in terms of client benefits (for example, Advisers being able to organise ad hoc workshops).

Specific interventions included EZ Advisers scheduling an entire day or half day to visit potential employers with an individual client, running 'Discovery sessions' (month-long programmes with two weeks in the classroom, and two weeks at computers job-seeking), setting up placements for clients with employers to enable them to build relationships, running confidence building workshops with 'homework', and distributing CVs. At least one Provider had organised workshops and seminars inside prisons to gain knowledge of the likely needs of ex-offenders and to inform them of the EZ.

Other innovative approaches included support for self-employment: For example setting up clients in the childcare business, helping a client to lose weight and then set up a personal fitness business, and in one case a client was sent to New York to promote his music industry business. There were also examples of providing innovative services, such as employing psychologists and physiotherapists to support clients. In one case, the services of these professionals were employed to do what was described as '*conditioning*' the client for work. Indeed, the focus on behavioural interventions and changing the client's attitude to work was seen as a major part of the work of EZ Providers, and was a central part of the 'work-first' approach. EZ Advisers reported that these interventions were helpful in achieving this.

5.3 Action planning

Stage 1 of the EZ process includes discussing an individual's barriers to employment and drawing up an Action Plan to document these alongside actions to overcome them with the help of an EZ Adviser. Most client respondents reported that this discussion had been useful and that their own perceptions of these barriers were included in their Action Plan:

'Yes I discussed these issues and ... these barriers form[ed] part of my Action Plan. No other barriers [were identified], just drugs and prison.'

(Early entrant, Birmingham)

'We discussed this [barriers to work] and other alternatives to finding employment which formed part of the Action Plan.'

(Lone parent, Brent/Haringey)

'All these personal problems were taken into account and formed part of my action plan'

(Lone parent, Brent/Haringey)

Clients were also asked about the extent to which Action Plans reflected discussions about their own job goals. Evidence on these issues was unclear. Many respondents reported that they did have job goals, but it was not clear that these were always incorporated in Action Plans. In cases where it was clear, respondents reported that

they both incorporated specific jobs and approaches to attaining employment. For instance, some respondents reported that they incorporated target numbers of applications per week in their Action Plans:

'Yes, looking for and applying for at least 10 jobs during the week – IT-based, maintenance and helpdesk.'

(NDYP returner, Southwark)

While the vast majority also reported that no additional barriers were identified by their Adviser, this may be because their recollection of the barriers identified by themselves is actually the product of discussions with their Adviser. However, the action planning process was also reported by some respondents to be problematic. For instance, some respondents thought that their action planning did not fully reflect their understanding of their barriers, or that there was little that their Adviser could do to help them to overcome them:

'[I] discussed these issues with the Adviser at [Provider] [but] it didn't form part of the Action Plan.'

(Lone parent, Tower Hamlets)

'I told the Personal Adviser this but there was nothing he could do. We got halfway through the Action Plan but I pulled out because they couldn't help me for what I want.'

(Early entrant, Birmingham)¹¹

'I told the Personal Adviser the type of job that I wanted which was put into the Action Plan but they couldn't find anything suitable.'

(NDYP returner, Birmingham)¹²

A very small number of other respondents reported that the action planning process was not undertaken at all or was not implemented, for specific individual barriers to work, or changes in personal circumstances. It is important to note that these reports are based on customer recall (completion of an Action Plan is a contractual requirement in relation to mandatory and voluntary customers):

'No. Don't remember drawing up an Action Plan. This may have been because my youngest child was going to start school in September and so it wasn't worth starting before then. Also the number of hours I would have to work to go back to make it worth my while.'

(Lone parent, Liverpool)

¹¹ This client wanted to gain help with starting a business as a self-employed gardener. They specifically wanted funding to buy a van.

¹² This client wanted to be a data-entry clerk or a motor mechanic.

'Yes, but never really addressed it. I got a new girlfriend and moved on personally, and could therefore afford to go back to work.'

(NDYP returner, Southwark)

5.4 Choice

Non-mandatory clients provided additional insights into issues concerning choice. Clients were asked a small number of questions regarding choice of Provider. Lone parents in London were asked whether they thought it was 'a good thing' that they had been able to choose their Provider, and other clients¹³ were asked if they would have preferred a choice. Those that had been able to choose, overwhelmingly reported that they liked this and those that did not reported that they would have liked to have had the opportunity. However, for lone parents in London, their qualitative responses indicated that this positive attitude toward choice was as much related to their subsequent ability to move between Providers as it was to their initial choice, though one respondent suggested that this allowed them to act on a word-of-mouth recommendation.

Customers that were not able to choose between EZ Providers of lone parent services but reported that they would have liked the opportunity suggested a number of reasons for this. These included a simple faith in the benefits of choice: *'Choice is a good thing.'* (Lone parent, Glasgow). More considered responses suggested that choice would open the way for more specialisation on the part of EZ Providers or enable clients to choose according to their preferred location. The importance of good information about any choices was discussed by some contributors.

'If you have a disability or specific job goal it might be good to choose.'

(Lone parent, Glasgow)

'Yes, I would have preferred a place closer to where I live. My dad is ill and sometimes I have to care for him.'

(NDYP returner, Birmingham)

'...[it would be good] ...if you knew about the alternatives.'

(NDYP returner, Liverpool)

¹³ Our client cohort did not include lone parents elsewhere who had had a choice, due to timing issues.

5.5 Barriers to work (individual and structural)

This section discusses barriers regarding the success of Multiple Provider Employment Zones (MPEZs), starting with barriers that may relate to EZ provision and moving on to address broader issues. Barriers specific to different client groups are dealt with in more depth in the preceding chapter, which also includes EZ Provider and Jobcentre Plus perceptions of barriers.

Those clients that did not find employment while registered with an EZ attributed their lack of success to a number of different causes. Some blamed the quality of service provided by the EZ Provider citing a lack of support, that their Adviser was too busy or did not fully take into account their personal circumstances. In other cases, the client suggested that the EZ Provider simply lacked the expertise or connections in the appropriate sectors:

'Their lack of expertise in the field I was looking. It's hard to help someone look for a job if you don't understand the kind of job they are looking for.'

(Lone parent, Liverpool)

'Lack of, and no consistent support. The support wasn't enough – the PA was not there, off ill, too many on her caseload – in the end you lose interest.'

(Lone parent, Southwark)

'The info I gave to my PA wasn't being used. My PA would try to find full-time employment when I'd specified part-time. I didn't always have one-to-one support time, the PA would get interrupted or distracted.'

(Lone parent, Southwark)

Others reported criticisms of the material help available through the EZ:

'I don't think there's enough support out there for single parents. I don't think it's all their fault, though when you consider I'm paying £800 a month nursery costs a little help would have been nice'

(Lone parent, Tower Hamlets)

In some cases it did appear that clients were applying for jobs that were inappropriate, for instance, where they could not meet the requirements of the job. There was also some evidence of clients being sent to do jobs that they could not do, for instance: *'EZ clients are just shoved into jobs, not really suitable jobs for example someone who couldn't stand for long was put on an assembly line.'* (Jobcentre Plus manager). In a few cases clients reported problems that should have been able to be resolved with some minimal level of support such as a lack of a bank account or personal paper work:

'Lack of birth certificate – this meant no employer would take me on as they wouldn't be able to pay me without a bank account. Also my lack of experience didn't help.'

(NDYP returner, Liverpool)

'I had four interviews, for three of these I needed a driving license and I don't have one – they should have checked. The other job was unsuitable.'

(Early entrant, Brent/Haringey)

Clients suggested that a range of other factors had been influential in preventing them from accessing work. For instance, many respondents reported that they lacked confidence as a result of a period out of employment. *'I was nervous. I get stressed going for interviews.'* (NDYP returner, Brent/Haringey). Some respondents reported motivational barriers: *'Lack of motivation as I have been unemployed for some time. Not sure what I want to do.'* (Early entrant, Birmingham).

Many respondents suggested that lack of work experience was a barrier to finding a job. This was both general and of a more specific nature, with some respondents reporting that they needed particular work experience in order to attain the type of work that they want. Respondents also reported a lack of qualifications and skills shortages as barriers to employment. For instance, several respondents reported that they lacked the types of social skills required in job interviews. Others reported that they lacked basic skills, or in the case of recent immigrants or some respondents from black and minority ethnic communities, basic English language skills:

'[I] couldn't make telephone calls to employers. [I] could search but not telephone because my English speaking was not so good.'

(NDYP returner, Liverpool)

Another prominent perceived barrier was childcare or other caring responsibilities. Many respondents reported either that a lack of childcare was simply a barrier to work or that there were insufficient jobs available that could accommodate childcare responsibilities through having flexible hours or hours suited to the school day. Clients also reported that the cost of childcare in combination with the likely low wages in available employment was a barrier as were other caring responsibilities, such as for elderly or sick relatives:

'I was a carer looking after my dad, so I could only pick jobs around the hours I was available to work.'

(Lone parent, Glasgow)

'I needed flexible working hours to fit around childcare.'

(Lone parent, Brent/Haringey)

Other barriers included transport to work, with lack of personal transport or perceived problems in the quality of public transport being cited as important. Transport to work was specifically problematic where working hours or shift patterns made these barriers even more problematic:

'Distance to travel. [I] found a job in Co-op but I had to travel for two hours to get there, and then it was shift work, only working three hours.'

(NDYP returner, Southwark)

Disability, mental health problems and depression also formed perceived barriers to work. Some other respondents thought that their age was a barrier to employment, specifically that they are too old for work. Some respondents also reported that having a criminal record was a barrier to employment. Others reported that behavioural problems such as drug or alcohol dependency were impediments to accessing work.

Specific work-related skills shortages or skills mismatches were also mentioned, where an individual may be highly skilled but in a declining industrial sector or occupational role. Some clients suggested that their failure to find work was related to the poor quality of the jobs available. It was less clear whether they intended this as a criticism of the failure of the EZ to be able to source appropriate or high quality vacancies or whether it was a criticism of the condition of the wider labour market, more generally.

'I have problems with literacy and numeracy and don't feel very articulate. I also find it difficult to find the right sort of work – I'm a skilled mechanic with an NVQ, but there are very few of these jobs available – there are more unskilled and less skilled jobs – these are unsuitable.'

(Early entrant, Brent/Haringey)

Clients also suggested that they were prevented from accessing work by a combination of their (sometimes multiple) problems and a lack of willingness from employers to accommodate them. For instance, clients suggested that employers may hold discriminatory attitudes or fail to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate childcare responsibilities through, for instance, allowing employees to work flexible hours:

'Once people know you have a small child it holds you back. Employers think you will be unreliable.'

(Lone parent, Tower Hamlets)

'I don't think I really got a fair chance from the employers I applied for jobs from – I think I was dismissed too quickly [interviewee had some physical disabilities]. Also, a lot of the jobs I wanted in warehouses meant working shifts, and on public transport it would be difficult for me to travel back too far when working nights.'

(NDYP returner, Glasgow)

Some clients also reported that they faced multiple or intractable barriers to work which had not been able to be overcome:

'It was down to me. I was very unhappy with my living arrangements and had my children to look after. There were too many barriers stopping me getting a job.'

(Lone Parent, Brent/Haringey).

'I can't write English and I need to speak English. I'm afraid to speak English.'

(NDYP returner, Liverpool)

'I was on drugs and in and out of prison. I was on a 'DTTO': a three-year programme the courts put me on – they test you twice a week to see if you are still on drugs.'

(Early entrant, Birmingham)

5.6 Client job aspirations and outcomes

Clients varied concerning the 'fit' between their aspirations and the services provided by MPEZs. The relevance of findings will of course vary as EZ is mandatory for some clients. It is worth pointing out that not getting the ideal job is not necessarily a negative thing, and that the EZs focus on 'realistic aspirations'.

Some clients also reported that the jobs that they entered while registered with the EZ matched their aspirations:

'Yes [the job was what they ideally wanted to do]. I learn people skills, up-to-date admin skills, communication over the phone and confidence to deal with people.'

(Lone parent, Glasgow)

'Yes, [the job was what they ideally wanted to do]. I've done this sort of work before and I loved it.'

(Early entrant, Birmingham)

Some clients reported that they were happy to be placed into any type of job and did not have specific job goals, and some respondents had significantly downgraded their expectations in order to access employment:

'I wanted any job as such. I just wanted any job to get me back into the routine of work.'

(Early entrant, Birmingham)

'My aim was to get a job that was worth doing and pays a decent wage. I can turn my hand to anything including machinist/quality.'

(Early entrant, Birmingham)

'I told them I would do any job. I was earning £40,000 previously, but any job paying £16,000 or less is better than signing on. Who wants to live on £55 per week benefit - it's crazy!'

(Lone parent, Tower Hamlets)

In other cases, clients reported that discussions with their Advisers had broadened or changed their job aspirations:

'Delivery jobs – [they] made me realise they weren't just jobs for men.'

(Lone parent, Liverpool)

'I had previously wanted to go into sales. I had experience of working with children and was encouraged to consider this area.'

(Early entrant, Tower Hamlets)

'I told them I wanted to be a singer/dancer. Then because I was too old I said I now wanted to work with people with disabilities and did a counselling course at college to help me achieve this goal.'

(Early entrant, Brent/Haringey)

A larger number of clients reported that the jobs they entered were not the sort of work that they ideally wanted to do. However, this was not necessarily perceived to be negative. Many felt that they just wanted to get a job for financial reasons or because they had been out of work for such a long time. Others did not see the job as ideal but thought that it might offer them work experience, get them back into the culture of work and offer them opportunities for progression:

'Not the type of job I wanted but I needed to get back into work.'

(Lone parent, Brent/Haringey).

'Not really, but as I was on the dole I took any job to help pay the bills.'

(Lone parent, Glasgow)

'I wanted to get into something to support myself. I'm going to look into something else later like bricklaying.'

(NDYP returner, Birmingham)

'No, I'd been out of work quite a while so I thought it would be good experience for me and perhaps get another position within the company.'

(NDYP returner, Brent/Haringey)

Several clients reported that their Adviser took a graduated approach to pursuing their aspirations. For instance, they would help a client search for their first choice job while also encouraging them to have alternative options if this was not possible:

'I was told to do two CVs, one being my first choice job, the second to find any sort of work. It's how the system works. Security work is something I considered.'

(Early entrant, Birmingham).

A small number of clients reported that their Adviser had used the action planning process to persuade them that their job aspirations were unrealistic:

'I don't think that it formed part of the Action Plan because basically they told me I was looking for the wrong type of work.'

(NDYP returner, Tower Hamlets)¹⁴

'The problem was I wanted a job in animal welfare but they tried to talk me out of this idea and into a job direction that suited them. This happened at [two different Providers].'

(NDYP returner, Brent/Haringey)

Others also thought that their aspirations were not given sufficient consideration and that the 'real' emphasis was on them finding some other work:

'... [at first] my Personal Adviser seemed more inclined to put me into any old job, not just the ones I was interested in.'

(NDYP returner, Liverpool)

'[Provider] want to know if you've had interviews, etc. They push and push you into work.'

(Early entrant, Birmingham)

'I told them that I wanted retail, but my first Adviser tried to push me into decorating.'

(NDYP returner, Southwark)

¹⁴ This client wanted to be a landscape gardener but was dissuaded from pursuing this because of the cost of qualifications and driving license. The client was subsequently submitted for a cleaning job.

'[Provider]... just seemed focused on getting me any job, not just the ones I was interested in. So far, I haven't got a job of the type that I am after.'

(NDYP returner, Glasgow)

One respondent though reported that they perceived this as a cynical process and there was never any serious intention of pursuing these aspirations:

'They got me to write down what I wanted to do but it was far fetched. It was pretty much them just going through the motions. It was a bit ridiculous really. I told them I wanted to be a plumber earning a decent income.'

(Early entrant, Brent/Haringey)

Additionally, a small number of clients conveyed the impression that their Provider was willing to help but was not able to support them into the types of jobs that they were suitable for. This appeared to occur primarily where a client had higher level skills or aspirations:

'I don't think they could have done anything else unless they had the contacts with employers. For what I was looking for they didn't have the knowledge or expertise in the web design field. I was just doing what I could do on my own but I knew where to look and they didn't.'

(Lone parent, Liverpool)

There were some concerns amongst stakeholders (Jobcentre Plus and statutory/voluntary and community sector stakeholders) about clients being pushed into inappropriate jobs that they could not sustain. Nevertheless there was the perception amongst some EZ and Jobcentre Plus contributors that many of the clients being dealt with by EZs needed to be dealt with in a more disciplinary manner than had been possible in Jobcentre Plus:

'These are the habitual signers. With those ones we have done what we can do and after 18 months the Employment Zone have done what they can do, they are the ones that definitely have no interest of going into work.'

(Jobcentre Plus Adviser)

5.7 Sustainability

Providers had a number of strategies for supporting sustainable jobs outcomes. Clients reported that their Provider supported them to stay in work by maintaining regular contact. This included both telephone calls and visits to the employer and some clients clearly felt that this contact was valuable and that their Adviser would be able to help them resolve problems, should they arise:

'They called me to check up on how the job was going. This was useful I thought, as I knew that if I had any problems my PA would have been able to get me out of the job and find another.'

(NDYP returner, Glasgow)

'They would ring me up and ask if everything was OK, which I was happy about. I also had a visit from them. They told me at the start they do this sort of thing but I wasn't so sure it would happen.'

(NDYP returner, Tower Hamlets)

Many clients reported that they received financial incentives to move into employment and to stay in it for 13 weeks. Such incentives seemed to be widespread, used across different Providers and different EZ areas. The amounts varied, but generally a larger amount was offered for sustaining work:

'After three months in work they contacted me to say I was entitled to £100 for staying in the job, which was really useful.'

(NDYP returner, Brent/Haringey)

'After thirteen weeks of employment I got a cheque for £75 or £100.'

(Lone parent, Liverpool)

'A £50 get to work bonus, and £200 for being in work for three months.'

(NDYP returner, Southwark)

'Received a grant of £250/£500 after I had been in my job for a couple of months.'

(Early entrant, Southwark)

Where clients entered a job while registered with the EZ, they confirmed that their EZ Provider had helped to support them to stay in work. Clients were asked about the support provided by the EZ Provider to make claims for in-work benefits as part of the transition to work. The vast majority of those that entered work reported that they had received this support and that it had worked very well:

'It was fine, there were no problems in getting my back to work bonus and also Working Tax Credits which [the Provider]... helped me apply for.'

(Lone parent, Glasgow)

'[The Provider]... went through what I was entitled to and helped me fill the forms in. I didn't know what I was entitled to before that.'

(Lone parent, Liverpool)

Clients reported that they had received support from their Provider for a variety of timescales ranging from a week to the whole three months and beyond, with no pattern being discernible between different Providers or client groups, suggesting that this was a decision based on the needs of the individual client. While a small number clients suggested that the length of time they received support for should

have either been shorter or longer, the majority were satisfied that they had received support for *'...long enough.'* (Early entrant, Birmingham)

It was less clear that the jobs clients gained were sustainable over the longer-term (however, longer-term sustainability is not a target for the EZs). About half of our respondents who found work reported that their jobs had lasted approximately three months, but after sixth months the number still in work had fallen by about half again. Only half of the clients interviewed reported getting a job via the EZ in the first place, although it is important to emphasise the qualitative nature of these figures, which means that firm conclusions cannot be drawn.

Where clients had left jobs, the reasons that were offered varied. Some reported that the job was always of a temporary nature: *'Temporary short-term agency work which ended. You were looking for something more permanent and didn't mind stepping out of my trade to get something more permanent.'* (Lone parents, Liverpool). Others reported that they encountered difficulties at work. These ranged from disputes with other members of staff or difficulties with their employer. Difficulties with their employer included tensions in taking time off work for family or caring responsibilities:

'I was accused of both not turning up for work or turning up late - this wasn't true as I turned up for 7am, and it was the shop manager (where I was cleaning) who was late turning up but then accused me.'

(NDYP returner, Glasgow)

'I was sacked after having a falling-out with a more senior member of staff.'

(Early entrant, Liverpool)

'When asking [Provider] for work I asked for daytimes only, but in [employer], after I started they said I could only do night shifts. I also had family issues that they said I'd lose my job over if I took time off, which I did!'

(NDYP returner, Liverpool)

Clients also left their job simply because they didn't like it: *'It was a horrible place, so I decided not to go anymore.'* (NDYP returner, Southwark). Others left because they didn't think that the job matched what they had been promised: *'It wasn't the job it was supposed to be.'* (NDYP returner, Tower Hamlets) or because it didn't match their aspirations:

'Cleaning toilets – not the kind of work that was wanted.'

(Lone Parent, Liverpool)

Some clients also reported the recurrence of the problems that had acted as a barrier to employment in the first place, such as ill-health, childcare problems, alcohol dependency or even being sent to prison, lending some weight to the responses of some EZ Providers that the problems that some of their clients face are intractable,

need significant professional interventions and are unsuitable for programmes like the EZ.

'I went on sick and eventually I was told there was no job for me to return to.'

(NDYP returner, Brent/Haringey)

'[I left as a result of] health problems due to excessive drinking.'

(Early entrant, Birmingham)

EZ Providers understood the importance of job sustainability and had a number of strategies for supporting this. Some Providers stressed the importance of getting clients into jobs they want as being key to employment sustainability – although Provider staff also recognised that much of the work that clients enter is entry-level. Providers emphasised the role of regular contact with the client and the employer (telephone calls and sometimes visits), although maintaining regular contact with the employer was sometimes reported to be difficult, and there were reports that some employees resented the intrusion of visits. Many Providers set a standard level of minimum contact, such as once a week.

Some Providers had also established a dedicated staff resource to in-work support in addition to regular contact with the client's Adviser. Some Providers undertook risk assessments prior to starting employment so that likely problems could be anticipated and plans developed to cope with them. These were then documented in an in-work support plan. The same Provider then established a support package with contact telephone numbers and 'what to do if...' advice. The importance of 'soft' support, such as offering encouragement after the 13-week period had finished and practical help, such as updating CVs, was also emphasised. Some Advisers reported that they are happy to provide advice and support (e.g. updating CVs, interview advice) long after the 13-week period, and that they were happy to do this because of the satisfaction that it gave them to see a former client progressing.

'We phone every Friday to make sure they are OK, we encourage them to come back to us if they have issues not just sign on. It shows them that we do care and that they are not dropped as soon as they start work. We just got funding through [Provider] for later support.'

(EZ Adviser)

Early notification that a client has not sustained work and then a rapid and intensive intervention to find another job quickly was reported to be the most successful approach to getting a client back into work if they failed to sustain the job.

There was some evidence from Providers of the use of 'incentives' to clients to start and stay in work such as washing machines, driving lessons and cash payments. However, other Providers suggested that they had moved away from these types of incentives and that payments for such expenses needed to be job-related (for example, travel passes and work clothes) and clearly planned prior to starting work.

Some Advisers felt that the 13-week period was somewhat arbitrary and that a longer period of support would be beneficial. They also reported that it would be beneficial if a longer-term progression plan could be established, with funding used to support progression training. This would help clients build-up an experience and track record of employment at the same time as avoiding them becoming trapped in entry-level jobs or a cycle of temporary low-paid work, punctuated by periods of unemployment and inactivity. Another recommendation was that the Providers should be able to restart people completely on their own rather than rely on Jobcentre Plus administration.

The efforts that Providers make to ensure sustainability were generally welcomed by Jobcentre Plus respondents, even where they were generally critical of the EZ. For instance, one Adviser remarked:

'Both Providers are exceeding their targets in respect of retention and Jobcentre Plus strongly welcomes the efforts that the Providers have made and successes the Providers have achieved...'

5.8 Wider outcomes for clients

Clients were asked questions that aimed to assess the impact of participation on them as individuals which might be aside from direct labour market outcomes. They were also asked whether and how their experience of participating on the EZ had changed the way that they think about work. This is important, given the emphasis that EZ Providers themselves placed on achieving this. Again, while the work with clients was not quantitative in nature, a significant minority of respondents did report that they had changed the way they think about work as a result of participation in the EZ. The most frequently cited impacts from participation on the EZ were increased confidence, motivation and willingness to work. Clients reported that they had become discouraged by their personal circumstances or the length of time they had been out of active participation in the labour market and that the impact of the programme had been to resolve this:

'It doesn't matter if you are a single mum, you can find work. They take away the thought that you are useless.'

(Lone parent, Brent/Haringey)

'I'm a lot more confident and have a better attitude towards work – I'm more eager to get a job now.'

(Lone parent, Glasgow)

'Better than thought it would be, more focused on you as a person, more concerned about people, not there just to fill [a]... job.'

(Lone parent, Liverpool)

When asked directly about the impact of the programme on their confidence and motivation, large majorities of clients reported that both had increased. In particular, increased confidence was associated with improved communication skills. Clients felt more able to make the first contact with employers and to present themselves at interviews or speculative job enquiries. The types of intervention that had helped to develop this enhanced confidence were consultation and counselling with their Personal Adviser, interview practice and coaching and work experience through entering work, even briefly, or work placements. Increased motivation was associated with increased willingness to work and to look for work independently:

'I now find it easier to talk to people, especially employers, after having the training sessions with my PA.'

(NDYP returner, Glasgow)

'I generally feel better about looking for work - more positive and motivated – as a result of the help I got from my PA.'

(NDYP returner, Glasgow)

'[I am better at] communicating with people. More confidence in myself.'

(Lone parent, Liverpool)

Building on this, when asked directly about the impact of the programme on their job search skills, a large number of clients reported that they had improved. This was largely through increased motivation, coupled with awareness of a wider range of channels for job searching, such as newspapers, the internet or direct speculative approaches to employers.

However, clients were less likely to report that their job-related skills or career prospects had increased as a result of participation on the programme itself. Where clients had entered work, even where this was not sustained, they were asked to identify the benefits of this for them in the longer-term. Many clients did suggest that there were things that they had learnt while in this work that may be useful in the future. Where they did identify benefits, though, these tended to be in specific skills, competencies and even qualifications related to the specific job that they had been in:

'[I gained an] NVQ in cleaning (gained Level 1) and have done my Food Hygiene Certificate.'

(Lone parent, Southwark)

'Training in hospitality. Knowledge in how to run private functions. This will help me if I need to move into a full-time job.'

(Lone parent, Liverpool)

Some clients did though report that they perceived themselves to have gained more transferable softer skills and competencies:

'[I have gained] team building skills and a good appreciation of the pace of proper work.'

(NDYP returner, Glasgow)

5.9 Wider labour market and strategic outcomes and issues

Note: It is important to remember that the discussion which follows is based upon qualitative data and a small number of interviews with a group of clients, targeted on lone parents, New Deal for Young People (NDYP) returners and early entrants who had completed their EZ programme between April 2005 and February 2006. The research was not quantitative and indicators of overall levels of job entries and their sustainability should be assessed from the quantitative evaluation which is being undertaken by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Of the 121 clients who were interviewed for the qualitative evaluation, less than half had attained a job entry at the time of the interview¹⁵. Clients reported that they entered jobs in retail, catering and hospitality, cleaning, administration, call centres, other services and unskilled manual work. A small number of clients reported entering higher-level services jobs and skilled manual jobs. The majority of jobs entered were full-time and permanent.

The majority of those that got a job while registered with the Provider suggested that the Provider had some influence over their job entry, either through finding the vacancy, encouraging the client to apply or use their own initiative to contact employers – although a small number of clients reported that they found their job without the help of the Provider or otherwise with the help of Jobcentre Plus. Where the client felt that the Provider had been in some way influential they tended to offer a large degree of the credit for having entered the job to the Provider:

'All down to ... [the Provider], finding it, taking me to the interview and helping with my interview confidence.'

(NDYP returner, Liverpool)

'There were actually setting up the interviews for me and helping me fill in forms. They had jobs coming in daily which I could go through on the computer.'

(Lone parent, Liverpool)

¹⁵ It should be noted that this was a qualitative study and respondents were at different stages of the EZ process, therefore, this cannot be taken as an indication of the 'job entry rate' or any other quantitative indicator.

There was very little evidence of clients moving from the job that they gained while registered at the EZ as the result of progression to a higher level job or one that better matched their aspirations. Only one respondent reported that they had moved to another job at all and this was simply reported as the recommendation of a family member. However, it should be noted that such longer-term outcomes are not the stated goal of the EZ initiative.

When clients left the job that they gained while registered with the EZ, they tended to return to Jobcentre Plus, though a small number did return to their Provider. Those that returned to Jobcentre Plus reported a mixed set of outcomes, with some entering a period of renewed job search while others appeared to have prepared for another lengthy period of time outside the labour market. Again, there was a mixture of reactions to this with some reporting that they were frustrated by their inability to stay in work:

'Didn't want to go back, I would have preferred to stay in my job but couldn't. I had to start an IS claim.'

(Lone parent, Liverpool)

'I didn't like it at all, I was used to work by then and didn't like having to go back into the jobcentre for signing on.'

(NDYP returner, Glasgow)

A small number of clients reported that they would have liked to return to their EZ Provider. The small number that did return to the Provider, reported that they resumed job search activity and just under half achieved a second job entry. However, these jobs tended to be temporary and were not generally sustained.

Among those who did not get a job during Stage 2 of the EZ, the majority did not remain with the Provider for the follow-on period. Clients reported a number of reasons for not remaining with their Provider, though no clear pattern emerged among these. Many reported that this was effectively a 'non-decision'; that they weren't aware that there was a choice or that there was no particular rationale for the decision. Others reported that they felt that the Provider had lost interest or that they did not think that continued participation in the EZ was worthwhile. Others suggested that their personal circumstances had changed, with implications for their benefit status, such as beginning a period of cohabitation, being pregnant or moving house, meaning that they were no longer eligible for the EZ.

Among those that did decide to stay with their Provider after the end of Stage 2, the main reason for continued participation was that they felt that the Provider added value to the job search process and still hoped to be successful. In making this decision, some clients reported that they were encouraged to do so by their EZ Adviser or by Jobcentre Plus. No consistent message emerged from clients' responses in relation to any change in the level or type of service during the follow-on period. The majority felt that there was no particular change, while a roughly

equal proportion of others thought that the level of service had intensified as those that thought it had declined.

There was some suggestion by a small minority of statutory stakeholders (not contributors from Jobcentre Plus) that EZ Providers needed to be more linked with strategic initiatives so that placements were made in growth sectors, thereby contributing to other growth and development initiatives, such as the achievement of Local Area Agreements or Neighbourhood Renewal Unit Floor Targets. There was no evidence of EZs working with Local Strategic partnerships. In one case, a councillor expressed concerns that:

'...there is an issue about democratic accountability – a democratic deficit. Elected Members don't know what's going on because all we get is returns about job placements ... we couldn't argue with the provision itself – it is how the clients are selected that is the problem and the relationship between this and what else is being done in the locality.'

There were also concerns that a minority of clients are able to exploit weaknesses in the administration and rules of the EZ system and that some clients are proactively doing this – although it is important to note that evidence for this came only from a small number of contributors:

'A lot of people know the system and how to get around EZs. There is even a website called Doledodgers. For example people do it by being missed and not getting referred back for six months, and then you don't have to go to EZ again for another 18 months.'

(Jobcentre Plus Adviser)

5.10 Summary of main points

- Generally, most clients were happy that the Providers had done all they could to support them into work. Clients reported a range of success factors, including friendly offices, one-to-one support from the Advisers, financial help, and the facilities to help with their job search that were made available to them.
- Providers identified success factors as including regular contact with clients, clients sharing the financial benefits, respectfully addressing clients' assumptions and barriers to work, flexibility and client-appropriate help and confidence building. Examples of innovative service provision were given in some cases. It is worth noting that there was evidence that clients would prefer to be able to choose their Provider.
- Clients' views varied concerning the 'fit' between their aspirations and the services provided by EZ Providers. In some cases, jobs entered via MPEZs matched client aspirations; in some instances, clients changed their aspirations following discussions with Advisers; some clients were happy to get any job and some reported that their Advisers took a graduated approach to helping them reach their aspirations (for instance pursuing both first choice and alternative options).

- A large number of clients reported that the jobs they entered were not ideal from their perspective, but this was not necessarily perceived to be negative. However, in some cases clients felt that their aspirations were not given sufficient consideration or that the Providers were willing to help but did not have the expertise.
- Clients discussed a range of barriers that they faced in accessing work, including a lack of skills or experience, childcare or other caring responsibilities, a lack of confidence, and in some cases mental health problems, age, or other issues. For some clients multiple intractable barriers to employment had not been overcome, partly because of a perceived lack of willingness by employers to accommodate clients.
- Providers had a number of strategies for supporting sustainable job outcomes, including regular contact with employers, help with benefits, and financial incentives to clients. Clients confirmed that their Provider had helped them stay in work.
- Where clients did not sustain work, reasons varied, including the nature of the work (temporary or perceived as inappropriate) or a recurrence of the problems that acted as a barrier to work in the first place. When clients left, EZ Providers acted quickly to try to find them another job. Longer-term job sustainability was less clear overall, but this is not a target for EZ Providers.
- Clients identified the outcomes (in addition to direct labour market outcomes) of EZ participation as including increased confidence and motivation as well as better job search skills. Clients were less likely to report that their job-related skills or career prospects had increased.
- It is not possible to assess labour market outcomes based on the results of a qualitative sample. Indicative findings suggest that the jobs entered by EZ clients included retail, catering and hospitality, cleaning, administration, other services and unskilled manual work. The majority of jobs were full-time and permanent, and where jobs were found and the majority of clients felt that the EZ had been influential in this outcome.
- There was very little evidence of clients progressing or changing jobs (progression, however, is not a target for EZ Providers). Clients who were not immediately re-employed if they left a job tended to return to Jobcentre Plus, although some returned to their EZ Provider.

6 Perceived added value of Multiple Provider Employment Zones

This chapter examines the ways in which Employment Zone (EZ) provision was seen by respondents to add value to job recruitment processes and the labour market. The following themes are addressed: resources to clients, the labour market, flexibility and other issues, competition, and comparison between Jobcentre Plus and EZ Providers.

6.1 Resources to support clients

The main added value of EZ overall was thought to lie in the level of resource available for individual clients, which allowed the flexibility to cross-subsidise and to tailor interventions to meet the needs of individual clients (see below). Providers felt that freedom to offer in-work support and payments, and to access funds to help clients in other ways, were of benefit. Some Providers discussed their role in getting clients to sign-off and legitimise any 'grey economy' work by proving to them that they will be better off that way.

In general, the focus on clients' own aspirations, their barriers, and the time available to manage these realistically, were thought to be of benefit. The regularity and frequency of sessions appeared important, and some Providers discussed the usefulness of getting clients '*out of the house*' and acclimatised to timekeeping and routine. Providers stressed the one-to-one support that is on offer and their commitment to clients, for example:

'We trust people and treat them with respect. EZ does work – we speak to them, listen, and so on.'

(EZ Adviser)

'EZ takes ownership of client issues – you have to deal with the issues that are impeding people's progress to work... We use a person-centred approach involving prolonged effort. We challenge their excuses, having built up a relationship with them – we see them twice a week and it will be the same person every time... You have to look past immediate perceptions and identify things like lack of confidence.'

(EZ Adviser)

Although they acknowledged the different characteristics of different EZ Providers, some stakeholders thought that EZ Providers had more resources for front-line activities than Jobcentre Plus.

6.2 The labour market

Providers discussed a range of benefits that they felt were derived from their service. They stressed the value to the labour market of increased success in matching people with jobs and benefits to employers. In one case, for instance, a Provider cited key benefits as client employability, reduced paperwork for employers and avoidance of flooding employers with applicants. Other Providers suggested that they were well placed to help employers, for instance one claimed that because EZs work in a commercial environment they are better placed to understand the needs of employers. The retention services provided by EZ Providers were seen, in some cases, as a *'massive selling point – employers see it as an extension of their HR department'*. EZ contributors said for example:

'EZs provide a ready pool of people that people [employers] know quite a bit about them – that they have gone through a certain regime...it is almost like people have been through a process and assessed as being ready for that particular job.'

(EZ Adviser)

Stakeholders also identified the linkages pursued with employers as major advantages of EZ provision. A further stakeholder said that:

'EZs match employee caseloads to employer. They have a lot more time to do this. The quality of vacancies will vary as will the types of employer. EZs are useful...I think Jobcentre Plus is better organised to do recruitment but the government has decided to reduce Jobcentre Plus and we must make the most out of how things have changed.'

Some Providers discussed the limitations imposed by the labour market on the added value of the programme, noting a lack of provision for clients to progress into 'proper' careers. Another issue is that some employers are reluctant to take on people aged 23 and above as apprentices. Some Providers noted the importance of showing clients the difference between a survival and a career job and that taking the former may be a route to the latter. However, the poverty trap is still seen as affecting job starters. Several respondents noted difficulties concerning the economic and social context, for instance:

'It is a tough client group and a grey economy. If we are very successful we could talk ourselves out of business – they won't pick us if they are already working on the grey economy. But if we suspect this we can test it by insisting they come in every day, in many cases we get them to sign off and legitimise...the benefit gap has changed because of Working Tax Credit – all groups are better off, and we do get a lot doing the 16-hour option which allows access to benefits.'

(EZ Adviser)

There were variations in the satisfaction expressed by employers in relation to different EZ Providers, but no clear pattern emerged. Some employers said that they did not see the EZ Provider service as being particularly distinct or as providing any real added value to employers, or said that the recruits were much the same, and a couple of employers thought that it was too early to tell. However, a large proportion of employers did express positive views about EZs. This was particularly the case when employers worked closely with Providers in developing recruitment processes. In some cases, Providers were seen as *'partners in recruitment – we lean on them and they lean on us for support'*; or as *'a good recruitment tool – saves me time and helps get the right person for the job'*.

Benefits that were discussed included cost-free recruitment; in some cases, pre-screening of applicants; Providers *'going over and beyond'* to help employers; in some cases, good organisational links; plentiful applicants found at short notice; arranging interviews for employers which saves time; Advisers helping clients fill in forms *'which is good for me because at least it means they are legible'*; dedicated EZ Advisers for candidates to speak to when necessary. One employer described the EZ Provider with which they dealt as being *'very helpful... they are quite proactive – they are trying to get people into jobs. We are very impressed'*, *'we get more attention from them – Jobcentre Plus are too time consuming – [Provider] are more efficient and provide more'*.

Other positive aspects reported by employers included Providers coaching employers at the outset to know what to expect in terms of candidates perhaps being nervous due to being out of work for a long time; Providers coaching recruits so that they know what to expect and how to behave, a perceived better calibre of candidate; financial and practical support to candidates; in some cases Providers allowing a week's trial of new recruits; good levels of retention and good in-work support. In some cases employers and Providers work closely together to achieve good matching, for instance Providers sitting in on interviews so that the employer knows that they are asking potential recruits the right questions. Employers said that it:

'...saves me a lot of trouble...if I was to compare [Provider] and the local paper I would get a better candidate from [Provider] than I will from the local paper – out of every ten from the paper and ten from [Provider] I could probably employ nine from [Provider] and maybe half or one from the paper.'

'For us [a local community organisation] the cost incurred of putting an ad in a newspaper...going through the whole recruitment process of sending out application forms seemed more money, time and effort than we could put in really. The service for us has been very quick, effective, smooth and incredibly helpful.'

There was considerable evidence from employers of improved service over time – for instance, one employer thought that service had improved since the introduction of pre-screening and pre-interview training. Improvements were seen as being due to good communication, for example employers said that:

'At the beginning [Provider] wasn't really sending the right kind of candidate, they couldn't even get through the training, but now she's got a better understanding of what my needs are – it's really got better over the last three months.'

and in another case:

'...last year there were teething problems – there was not a lot of follow-up. This year they turned up with application forms, had discussions with us, and they have been good.'

Employers did report some negative experiences of EZs, or mixed experiences for instance: *'...it has been good and bad...I have got one person I always refer to and she's still here which is really good but overall I can't say it's fantastic or that all the people stay'*. There was evidence that in some localities employers' experiences and views of Providers varied considerably, with better experiences of some Providers than others, depending, for instance, on the package of support available to clients and the levels of communication between Advisers and employers, for instance: *'[Provider 1] are less target driven...and more concerned about whether the job was right for the candidate [than Provider 2], and more client focused'*. In some cases problems were attributed to high rates of organisational change within the Provider agencies, affecting communication and continuity as well as in-work support. In one case, for instance, the employer felt that the quality of recruits was variable, with a high level of unsuitable candidates (in terms of skills and experience), and sometimes a slow response from the Provider in filling vacancies (out of approximately 43 vacancies advertised with the Provider, only 12 were filled). In one case an employer expressed a preference for paying agencies because *'they obviously have a lot more people to choose from so they would sometimes come out with a person quicker'*. In another case, retention rates for EZ recruits were described as very poor. In a further case, success rates were described as variable, for example one employer said that:

'[Provider] has been a little bit difficult because I had one initial contact whom I wasn't receiving any responses from...it seems like for them it depends on who saw the vacancies and sent them out. Success seems largely related to the individual Advisers: If they don't put in the effort you're not really going to get anything back, even if there are tens of people who are suitable for the role. It takes work to sift through those and find the right people.'

'...being brutally honest, guys with a trade – carpenters, electricians – if they've not worked for six or seven months there's usually a reason for it... we've been let down by some people they've sent through.'

6.3 Flexibility and related issues

Jobcentre Plus contributors generally confirmed the views of EZ Providers that the flexibility and resources available to EZ Providers gave them additional opportunities to support people into work, as did the opportunity to develop closer personal relationships between clients and Advisers. Some of the stakeholders also expressed the view that the flexibility of EZs enables them to have an impact. Jobcentre Plus contributors said, for example, that:

'...if they are ten minutes late we are rushing them along...at the Employment Zone if it takes 40 minutes it takes 40 minutes...we are restricted...so just as we are building up to something we may have to go "right, see you next week".'

(Jobcentre Plus Adviser)

'The Providers' ADF, or whatever they call it, is so much more flexible than ours ever was. We had a limit anyway and now we only have £100 per customer.'

(Jobcentre Plus manager)

One EZ contributor noted that there was a view amongst some people that EZs take a more robust approach to getting people into work, and another saw EZ as being good for tackling those harder-to-help customers who exist on benefits and have no desire to work. A few stakeholders held similar views, for instance: *'EZ can give people a real push'*.

The different culture to that of Jobcentre Plus was also thought to be helpful, for instance it was described by advisers as *'informal and less stuffy, people open up and talk about key issues, they feel less like we are trying to catch them out'*. A number of EZ contributors discussed the benefits of getting customers out of Jobcentre Plus offices, and the role of EZ in contributing considerably to Jobcentre Plus targets. Findings indicated that the EZ model may be helpful because it creates a separation between the function of job search and coaching on the one hand, and that of benefit dispersing and sanction on the other. This worked to create a more successful impression of the EZ Providers being there to help the client into work:

'It is the environment of what the Jobcentres are like – you go there but because people are going in there to sign on it is like they don't really want to be there longer than they have to be. In the EZ there is more of a supportive environment – you see people talking to each other, helping each other. In the Jobcentre, although we would like to offer it, you don't get the same kind of privacy to sit down and discuss the types of issues they have.'

(Jobcentre Plus Adviser)

Some stakeholders saw EZ as adding considerable value, for instance, an organisation doing outreach with lone parents described the Provider they work with as offering many benefits, including the capacity to deal with multiple problems and barriers to work – and for this particular Provider, other benefits arose because it was located in a centre which provided other services such as debt counselling and childcare, which made it accessible to the local community and a community focal point. For lone parents, the fact that EZ is voluntary and is a different scheme to those offered by Jobcentre Plus, is seen as an advantage – it is seen as offering more options and as being more community-oriented:

'...we have a fresh approach – they may not have heard of us before. We are a tailored and individual service, reaching people in the community – a free and inclusive service.'

(EZ Adviser)

6.4 Competition

A minority of Providers suggested that healthy competition between Providers means better value for money than the Single Provider model: *'The competition keeps you on your toes – we are driven commercially and have to look at what our competitors are doing'*. There were mixed views from Jobcentre Plus contributors on the competitive element of the Multiple Provider Employment Zones (MPEZs). It seemed overall that the competitive element was broadly welcomed, for instance one contributor reported that the Jobcentre Plus welcomes competition because it may improve customer service and potentially generate innovative methods and initiatives – although, in this locality, there is little evidence of real competition and some evidence of the Providers working together. Some contributors thought that the competitive element between Providers had given Jobcentre Plus increased leverage over single Provider contracts. Some contributors thought that increasing the competitive element by giving clients increased choice across Providers would be beneficial to the service received by them, for example *'competition has helped improve the focus of the service to clients'*.

The general view among respondents was that the 'multiple' part of the MPEZ had not had a chance to come fully into effect because of pre-arranged quota allocations. This meant that, with the exception of lone parents in London, there was little scope to assess the benefits or drawbacks of competition. In relation to lone parents, competition was clearly emerging but there was, as yet, insufficient evidence of what the outcomes of this would be, though there was some evidence of innovation to attract, retain and offer services to this client group, with thought clearly being devoted to their specific needs. One Jobcentre Plus manager argued that 'what works' is the key concern, whether this is public or private provision. He sees Jobcentre Plus as still having a crucial management role, but the MPEZ model is very good – not least because if one Provider is stronger in one area than others, it can still help clients and the healthy competition element of the EZ will usually ensure that the other Providers will quickly match its initiatives and performance. Competition

between Providers is seen as benefiting clients because of the range of provision that Providers seek in order to better serve clients and therefore, improve performance. However, one contributor noted that the lone parent EZ agenda is a complete alternative to Jobcentre Plus and may not add value to Jobcentre Plus as it is in direct competition – the competition aspect does add value but also *'the downside is getting people confused and fighting.'* (Jobcentre Plus Adviser)

6.5 Comparison with Jobcentre Plus

It is difficult to directly compare Provider and Jobcentre Plus performance. A large proportion of employers used a variety of sources for recruitment, perhaps including newspapers, notices in their outlets, non-EZ agencies, word-of-mouth, Jobcentre Plus and EZ Providers. In a minority of cases, employers said that sources other than either Jobcentre Plus or EZ were best, and in one case an employer stated that they used their own HR team with EZ only as a backup. Some of the employers wanted to continue using a variety of sources for recruits, as it provided more options. Some just used one or two sources and in a minority of cases did not use Jobcentre Plus at all, sometimes because of negative experiences, other times because they were satisfied with existing measures. In some cases a combined approach was taken as a matter of course, for instance: *'If you have got Jobcentre Plus, [and two local Providers] what you have is the manager having 15 good candidates to choose from – they get better value for money'*. Some employers valued the service provided by both Jobcentre Plus and by the EZ Providers, for example: *'They are both very helpful to the business and they give us the support we need and we always keep them informed with anything that is happening with [employer] and they are able to adapt and support us'* in one case, and *'Jobcentre Plus are equally good'* in another. A further employer thought that the service both provided was 'OK' and that Jobcentre Plus referrals were equally suitable.

In general, employers tended to view Jobcentre Plus as more bureaucratic and, in some cases, more time-consuming and impersonal than EZ Providers, as well as also less responsive and flexible. For example, one contributor said that it is irritating to have to go through central call centres and talk to people who do not know the area. According to a couple of contributors, pressure from Jobcentre Plus on people to get jobs meant that employers' time was wasted on people who did not actually want the job. For some employers, the success rates of Jobcentre Plus referrals were considerably lower than those of EZ referrals, because Jobcentre Plus screen people less, and anyone can ask to apply for a job.

The advantages of Jobcentre Plus were discussed, for example, one client said that Jobcentre Plus and the smaller Providers were good because they could provide local, community-based links which enhanced sustainability. In one case, an employer noted that there was only an approximate success rate of 25 per cent with Provider candidates as compared to the Jobcentre Plus success rate, which was almost 100 per cent. In another case, an employer preferred to use Jobcentre Plus because of the security of knowing that any candidates referred to them will be

legally entitled to work in the UK – something that cannot, according to this employer, be offered by any other organisations. Some employers noted that Jobcentre Plus had a more varied client base which they viewed as valuable, although in one case an employer said that although Jobcentre Plus staff are all motivated to get people into jobs, the client base (especially Incapacity Benefit (IB) clients¹⁶) was unsuitable for them. Some felt that Jobcentre Plus sometimes submitted too many unsuitable candidates for job vacancies – but others said that Jobcentre Plus candidates are of a higher quality than Provider ones.

Some stakeholders described Jobcentre Plus favourably in comparison to the EZs, highlighting concerns about the EZs. For instance:

'... we could do what EZ does in a more compassionate way ... we are dealing with long-term unemployed people, not job-ready people – second or third generation unemployed people who need to be supported once they are in work.'

(Job recruitment agency)

'It's awkward because there are low level jobs which people don't want and they are matching people with those jobs. It might be a stop-gap but for some people it may cause more harm than good...they have a bank of tame employers who will recruit from them. I imagine it works for people who want low-level jobs. But it's like a conveyor belt ...'

(Charity working with ex-offenders and those with drug/alcohol dependency issues)

Other stakeholders expressed some concerns over inappropriate submissions activity and the potential for abuse that exists, even where they did not have direct evidence of this actually taking place. One stakeholder argued that the commercial motivations of EZ Providers might hamper strategy development and the development of integrated approaches. One Jobcentre Plus manager noted that whilst they welcome the successes of the EZ, they are also aware of the role that a number of local organisations can play in helping a customer achieve a job outcome. Some Jobcentre Plus staff thought that they could do equally well or better than EZ Providers, given equality in the flexibility and resources available, for example in one district, the Advisers felt that if the district was allocated the same resource and could implement similar outreach work, they would probably match or exceed the EZ performance. A minority of Advisers expressed negative views of EZs, for instance suggesting that EZ funding would be better used to support Jobcentre Plus provision and to subsidise training opportunities.

¹⁶ Note that IB clients are not eligible for EZ provision.

6.6 Summary of main points

- Respondents discussed a range of benefits that they felt derived from EZ provision. The main value of EZ was seen to be the flexibility and level of resources enabled through the EZ programme, as well as the capacity to focus on clients' aspirations.
- Employers, overall, were positive about EZ, which, in many cases, was seen as supporting their recruitment processes, including coaching potential employees and in-work support. There was also considerable evidence of increased benefits over time, due to closer liaison between EZ and employer.
- Stakeholders acknowledged the resources and flexibility that the EZs provide, and some discussed the useful links that Providers have with employers and also the outreach they do, as well as their 'more robust' approach. The 'multiple' part of the EZ was generally seen as having not yet come into effect fully, but a minority of contributors saw competition as fostering better value for money.
- It is difficult to compare Jobcentre Plus and EZ performance – most employers use a variety of sources and some discussed the various pros and cons of these. Some preferred Jobcentre Plus but there was also evidence that some employers found EZ to be less bureaucratic and more tailored to their needs.
- Concerns were expressed by some statutory and voluntary/community sector stakeholders about the multiple barriers facing some clients, the way that some clients are seen as being 'pushed' into jobs. Several respondents also noted the potential that exists for closer integration between EZ provision and other local initiatives to tackle labour market issues.

7 Overview

This final chapter provides an overview of the key findings of the research, sets out some of the suggestions for improvement made by respondents and outlines a number of key issues raised by the research that need to be considered as the Multiple Provider Employment Zone (MPEZ) initiative progresses.

7.1 Operational issues

The Phase 2 qualitative study suggests that the MPEZ initiative is 'bedding down' to some extent, with indications of changes that are in line with the objectives of the initiative. Providers reported a wide range of approaches to working with different types of client, with some indications of innovation, particularly in relation to lone parents. Many of the operational issues encountered during the start-up phase of the MPEZ initiative have been addressed to the satisfaction of Employment Zone (EZ) Providers and Jobcentre Plus. In particular, respondents reported that technical difficulties with the Random Allocation Tool (RAT) had been largely resolved (although some Providers expressed concern about the level and variability of mandatory client flows). EZ Providers have begun to adjust their activities to take account of two key changes that have occurred since the Phase 1 evaluation study, namely the extension of lone parent contracts to all Providers outside London and changes in the structure of payments for lone parent clients and for sustainability of job outcomes. In particular, changes in management and organisational structures and in the training and development of Advisers have been, to some extent, contingent upon these changes in the contractual environment.

Operational changes implemented by EZ Providers have also been driven by processes of learning from the early phase of MPEZ operation, including moves to work more effectively with Jobcentre Plus and increased emphasis on marketing services to lone parents. Reductions in the flow of early entrants had also prompted some reassessment of EZ Provider activities and priorities, as had a perceived shift in the client base towards the 'hardest-to-help' groups. Sustainability of job outcomes was seen as an important issue, prompted mainly by the weighting of performance payments towards the achievement of 13-week sustainability. The research suggests

that job sustainability has become an increasing focus for EZ Providers, with many appointing staff to concentrate solely on providing in-work support.

EZ Providers operate a range of incentive structures for Advisers and other staff, including financial incentives in some cases. No clear pattern emerged from Provider responses on this issue, other than a feeling that financial factors were only one aspect of the picture in terms of employee motivation. EZ Providers and other respondents felt, in general, that the incentive structure built into the EZ contracts provided sufficient incentive to Providers to focus attention on getting clients into jobs that will sustain for at least 13 weeks. The general feeling was that changes in the structure of payments for lone parents were appropriate and provided a greater incentive for EZ Providers to engage with this client group. One result has been an increasing focus on lone parents, with a wide range of reported approaches to marketing to this group.

7.2 Partnership working

Working arrangements between EZ Providers and Jobcentre Plus were felt generally to have improved since the early implementation phase, but have been affected by changes at Jobcentre Plus, notably the Organisation Design Review and associated reductions in resources. EZ Providers stated that they were involved in local partnership working with a range of agencies to varying degrees; some stakeholders expressed concerns that partnership working was constrained by the commercial focus of EZ Providers and limited 'fit' with locally-based employment initiatives. In some instances there appears to be a need for greater 'fit' with local initiatives and partnerships – both greater participation by EZ Providers in partnerships, and better overall management and integration of initiatives. The issue of coordination between MPEZs and locality-based initiatives appeared to be a key one, although it would not be possible to ascertain whether it was the most important finding regarding MPEZ and partnership working. No overall pattern emerged in relation to EZ Providers' use of external provision for training and other services. In some cases this was extensive; in others Providers tended to rely on their own internal resources.

7.3 The labour market

EZ Providers were adopting an increasingly varied approach to labour market intelligence, the sourcing of vacancies and the submission of candidates to employers. In particular, a number of EZ Providers described approaches centred around the individual client as opposed to one concerned with filling vacancies that the Provider might happen to have 'on the books'. The research identified a range of approaches across EZs to building links with employers, with some evidence of specialisation on the part of some Providers in terms of sector, type of employer and/or type of vacancy. Evidence from the quantitative evaluation, being undertaken in-house by Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), will provide more robust evidence with which to judge the impact of MPEZ on job outcome and job

sustainability performance. Such judgements are central to the overall evaluation of MPEZs. Evidence from the qualitative evaluation, though limited, provides some indications on these issues. Many clients appeared to enter work after participation in the EZ, in the main taking up relatively low-level jobs for which longer-term sustainability was not clear. As noted above, long-term sustainability is not an explicit goal of the EZs, and the jobs provided via EZs are typically entry level jobs with the expectation that individuals will move on to other jobs.

Employers often clearly valued their linkages with EZ Providers and – for some – EZ Providers were important sources of recruitment. One key issue – beyond the scope of this evaluation, but nonetheless important – relates to the wider labour market impact of EZs. The emphasis of the EZ initiative, in line with wider UK labour market policies, is on a ‘work-first’ approach, with a limited focus on vocational training and qualifications. This research has illustrated how MPEZ is helping different groups of workless people into jobs, or in some cases, moving them nearer to the labour market, although it is not possible to quantify the impact on the basis of this qualitative study. Wider Government economic policies¹⁷ emphasise the need to promote workforce skills development, vocational training and qualifications in order to improve productivity, competitiveness and public service provision. A key issue to consider, therefore, concerns the linkages between ‘work-first’ initiatives such as EZs and activities (such as those promoted by the Skills for Business network¹⁸) to raise workforce skills. For example, a longer period of support to access the sustainability payment and a greater focus on in-work progression – potentially linked to training opportunities – might help to enhance the impact of EZ on the wider operation of the labour market.

7.4 Competition and comparison between EZ and Jobcentre Plus

Findings concerning the relative merits of private and public Providers were mixed. Whilst EZ Providers were able to offer higher levels of support than Jobcentre Plus, it was unclear as to whether this was simply because they were better resourced than Jobcentres Plus offices. Jobcentre Plus provides broader services, in particular regarding benefit claims, as well as referrals, so that in practice public and private provision was interlinked and interdependent. The study was unable to identify many benefits resulting specifically from the Multiple Provider aspect of MPEZs. This was largely because any impacts that might be expected from multiple provision and competition, such as innovation or specialisation, were limited by the constraints imposed by pre-arranged quotas of referrals and random allocation. Where competition between Providers was in place – in relation to lone parents – there had

¹⁷ See, for example, Department for Education and Skills (2005) Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work, Cm 6483, March.

¹⁸ See www.ssda.org.uk

been insufficient time between this becoming effective and the research taking place to be able to judge conclusively the impacts that have flowed from this. Having said this, there are potentially large consequences of moving from random allocation to full competition, such as the potential development of local monopolies and the more widespread use of incentives for clients to sign up as well as job entries and sustainability. Increased client choice would also need to be accompanied by effective mechanisms to ensure that clients have access to clear and appropriate information to enable them to make that choice.

7.5 Customer outcomes

Customers described a range of experiences and outcomes in relation to their involvement with EZ. While the methodology for the qualitative evaluation was inappropriate to make conclusive judgements about the success of EZ participation in driving sustainable job entries, the quantitative evaluation should be able to answer these questions. Evidence from the qualitative evaluation did suggest that clients had been moved closer to – or into – the labour market through, for instance, improved confidence, job searching and interviews skills, as well as more positive attitudes to work. A substantial number of customers felt that EZs had helped them to get work, in particular through offering financial incentives and practical assistance, help with in-work benefits, consideration of the multiple barriers that clients may face, and tailored support overall. There was evidence that the innovative approach that EZs are taking, especially with respect to lone parents, is reaching customers who might otherwise not be easily able to enter employment. However, some clients also reported dissatisfaction with the quality of job matching, or that they had been pushed into jobs that were not right for them, because of, for example, caring responsibilities, geographical location, physical impairment, or issues such as addiction problems which meant they were not job-ready.

7.6 Added value

EZ Providers, Jobcentre Plus respondents, stakeholders and employers described the added value of the EZ approach in terms of:

- the resources available to support clients and flexibility in their use;
- intensive one-to-one work with clients outside the setting of Jobcentre Plus, focusing on barriers to work and practical steps to overcome these;
- appropriate job matching, consequent upon close involvement with both employers and clients;
- a business-like approach which is attractive to employers;
- the potential to provide in-work support to a greater extent than is the case for other labour market programmes;

- a personal, flexible and responsive service for employers;
- a clear focus on job outcomes, as opposed to the wider responsibilities of Jobcentre Plus.

The added value of the Multiple Provider approach is less clear from the research findings, with the view expressed generally that it is too early to tell and that potential advantages need to be balanced against the fact that large numbers of clients are allocated randomly and have no choice about Providers. Nonetheless, respondents offered the following observations:

- healthy competition helps to keep Providers 'on their toes';
- innovative approaches to the attraction of, and provision of services for, lone parents have occurred largely as a result of competition between Providers;
- there may be a down side to competition in the sense that clients might become confused by the range of Providers and services;
- in principle, competition might enable Providers to specialise in particular client groups, employers or sectors, but this is constrained by the random allocation approach.

7.7 Respondents' suggestions for improvement

7.7.1 Clients

Clients made a range of suggestions for improvement (these were specific to experiences of particular EZs, making generalisation difficult). Suggestions included more time for clients with Personal Advisers (PAs), more support in achieving their desired job outcomes, less pressure to achieve any job outcome at the expense of a job outcome that was likely to be sustainable, confidence building programmes, better organisation concerning appointments, more training opportunities, and play and/or childcare facilities.

7.7.2 EZ Providers

Providers put forward a number of suggestions for improvement, some of which were broad and structural and others more specific. Some Providers discussed a need to rationalise programmes, change timing, or change referral processes. For instance, one contributor expressed the view that there are too many Welfare to Work programmes and that there needs to be a single programme with the potential to access different types of support. Providers also discussed ways of improving the operation of the EZ, and partnership arrangements. Some discussed the importance of client-Adviser relations, and argued that clients should be able to return to their Adviser and not go through the RAT if there are genuine reasons for failing to initially continue on EZ. A number of Providers discussed improving relations with Jobcentre Plus, including a need to be able to make recommendations via a report to Jobcentre Plus at the end of the programme; a need to rethink the

referral system because reliance on Jobcentre Plus for referrals was felt to make it difficult for Providers to meet their targets. Some Advisers thought that there should be additional scope for feedback to Jobcentre Plus regarding clients to be kept on file, such as where they are not interested in working or where they have overcome particular problems. The mandatory aspect of EZ provision was questioned by one Provider, who suggested that EZ would be able to operate on the basis of voluntary referrals and still generate comparable outcomes.

Some of the suggestions concerned timing issues. Some Providers questioned the 18-month period, suggesting that it embeds workless culture and allows barriers to build up, requiring more resources to tackle unemployment. Some thought that the four-week Stage 1 was too short and should be extended, perhaps to six weeks. Providers also discussed extending the 13-week period determining job sustainability. Some saw 13 weeks of support as being insufficient. Most employee probation periods with employers last a minimum of six months and this respondent thought that EZ Providers should support clients in work for this amount of time.

There was an indication from some Providers that there is a need for specialised provision providing intensive support for people with serious mental health or dependency problems. Some Advisers also thought that the performance incentive system should recognise 'distance travelled' toward the labour market for the hardest-to-help groups. In addition, some Providers also argued that six months from initial engagement to job outcome is too optimistic for these clients:

'Given the barriers some clients are facing, it's just not realistic to expect them to be job-ready in six months. Either they should receive appropriate provision under a different structure or they should organise EZ contracts whereby they can spend more time with them and give them the time and provision they need.'

(EZ manager)

The competitive aspect of EZ was also discussed by some, for example, one Provider said that MPEZs would work better with two Providers as three dilutes the level of help needed for harder-to-help clients who could effectively be grouped together. Another Provider said that whilst some competition between Providers can be healthy, if systems and approaches developed by one Provider are shown to be working, a continued competitive approach could drive down outcomes for Providers.

A large number of Providers suggested that a greater emphasis on training would be useful (at present this is not possible because training does not contribute to EZ performance measurement), for instance getting people qualifications, provision of training for niche needs, working with Connexions concerning apprenticeships, more English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision, being able to refer more people to a range of training programmes, and help for older New Deal for Young People (NDYP) returners regarding training.

7.7.3 Jobcentre Plus

Jobcentre Plus contributors made a number of suggestions, including the following (these are suggestions made by individuals and are not necessarily applicable across the board):

- accessing more job search and skills training;
- allowing Providers to specialise, for instance in relation to client groups, sectors or occupations for the same reason;
- more help for the hardest-to help customers;
- in one case, a need for Providers to investigate reasons for any non-attendance by clients more fully and to refer clients back to the Jobcentre Plus less readily – also in the case of harder-to-help clients;
- lengthening the four week Stage 1 by a certain amount;
- flexibility about sanctions, which are currently seen as being too harsh – the EZ Adviser needs to be able to use their own judgment. Additionally, sanctioning and the clock-stop that occurs afterwards should not be applied to the first Failure to Attend (FTA), as this causes a further barrier to the success of the EZ with that client;
- a need for better structures to support Provider accountability, including, perhaps, standardised complaints procedures with mechanisms to protect client identity/ interests and more information being provided concerning Providers roles and procedures;
- additional Jobcentre Plus Adviser flexibility to refer some clients to EZ Providers;
- if Providers were differentiated in some clear way then Jobcentre Plus could direct relevant clients to the relevant Provider – each Provider could be tasked with delivering separate key services and relevant clients could be directed accordingly;
- some Jobcentre Plus respondents thought that there was potential for EZ Providers to do more in relation to training for progression as opposed to preparation for work;
- some Managers thought that creative competition between Providers would be better fostered by customers being able to make a choice;
- a need for Jobcentre Plus to get shared and solid forecasts of customer group characteristics and numbers;
- contract management to be more locally centred, to enable greater local 'ownership' of the programme;
- increased local partnership work and a locality-wide approach to addressing entrenched local employment problems, as *'the Providers have tried out some interesting and thoughtful things but these alone cannot solve the local issues we have here'*.

7.7.4 Stakeholders

Stakeholders made a number of relevant suggestions. Some of these were strategic, including discussion of the need to address the role of EZ in relation to local partnership activities and coordination with other employment initiatives operating within the EZ districts. Some stakeholders suggested a need to temper the competitive, commercial culture of the EZs in order to prevent smaller stakeholders being subsumed; others felt that there was a need for a client-focused approach as opposed to one driven by meeting targets concerning job outcomes and initial sustainability.

7.8 Issues for consideration

A number of issues arise out of the research which, although limited information is available from the qualitative data collected, appear to be worthy of consideration as the MPEZ initiative is developed further:

- **Choice for mandatory clients:** Providers indicated that, in principle, they would be happy for this to occur. Issues regarding how this might be achieved and the potential effects on Providers (including reductions in flows for some) will need to be addressed.
- **Specialisation among Providers:** there are indications that this is starting to occur and would clearly be boosted by choice for mandatory clients. What are the implications – e.g. for Jobcentre Plus in advising clients about Providers?
- **Increasing proportion of 'hardest-to-help' customers:** this is likely to continue as a result of general labour market trends and policies to tackle high rates of Incapacity Benefit (IB) dependency. Providers have expressed some concern about their capacity to deal with this in the context of their contracts and the availability of specialist support in relation to particular issues (substance dependency, mental health issues, etc.). How can this be built into the MPEZ model?
- **Sustainability and progression:** the research suggests that customers face difficulties beyond the 13-week period in terms of retaining jobs and particularly in terms of progression to 'better' jobs. EZ needs to be linked more closely to employer training and skills initiatives – how can this be done in the context of an approach that emphasises 'work-first' and ends (in terms of financial incentives for Providers) at 13 weeks?
- **'Fit' with local initiatives and partnerships:** a key set of findings from this research relates to variations in relationships between EZ Providers and local partners. This raises the question of how EZ Providers can be encouraged to participate more fully in local initiatives and partnerships. For example, is there a case for increased geographical specialisation, with Providers concentrating on defined neighbourhoods rather than covering a whole district?

- **Local monitoring of EZ contracts and performance:** this is linked to the previous point, in the sense that wider knowledge among partner organisations about the services provided by EZ, and the client groups involved, should help to ensure more integrated approaches to tackling labour market issues at a local level.
- **Stimulating innovation:** the current model does not yet appear to be fulfilling its potential to stimulate innovation in service provision. Will a more competitive model help? How can EZ strike a balance between stimulating innovation and encouraging the spread of good/best practice?
- **Job quality:** linked to the progression issue. How can EZ ensure an 'acceptable' level of job quality, recognising the difficulties involved in persuading employers to take on 'hard-to-help' groups?
- **Quality of provision:** the main factor influencing quality appears to be the competitive nature of contracts, particularly in relation to lone parent provision, where client choice is partially dependent on perceptions of the quality of provision. A more formal quality assurance system and/or a mechanism for the systematic collection/analysis of customer and employer feedback on EZs, may help to inform client choice, particularly if competition were to be extended to groups for which allocation is currently random.

Appendix A

Groups eligible for early entry onto Employment Zone

Early entry criteria as described in the Employment Zone (EZ) contractor guidance are as follows:

'Some people have particular circumstances that make it harder for them to get work. They may be able to start an Employment Zone early if they are already getting Jobseekers Allowance. Once they start the Employment Zone programme, they must continue.'

This may include people:

- *with a physical or mental disability that need help with reading, writing or numbers;*
- *whose first language is not English Welsh or Gaelic;*
- *who are lone parents that do not live with a partner and are responsible for at least one child living in their household (by partner we mean a person somebody is married to or a person they live with as if they are married to them);*
- *who have served in the regular armed services;*
- *who were looked after as a child by a local authority;*
- *with a criminal record;*
- *with a drug problem;*
- *who have participated in Progress2Work;*
- *that have been told by the Home Office that they are officially a refugee that have been given exceptional leave to enter the United Kingdom by an immigration officer.'*

Source: Griffiths, R., Durkin, S. and Mitchell, A. (2005) *Evaluation of the Single Provider Employment Zone Extension*, Department for Work and Pensions, Research Report 312: 107.

Appendix B

Topic guides and customer interview questionnaire

Evaluation of Multiple Provider Employment Zones Discussion guide (telephone interview): employers

1 Background

- 1.1 Nature of organisation (sector, size, public/private etc.)
- 1.2 Numbers employed (total/in locality)
- 1.3 Number and types of people recruited (over past year or other appropriate period)
- 1.4 Awareness of Jobcentre Plus and EZ

2 Interaction with EZ Provider(s) that supplied contact

- 2.1 How did you come into contact with them? How long have you been dealing with them?
- 2.2 What sorts of dealings? (recruitment, placement, in-work support, other)
- 2.3 How many jobs have been advertised through this Provider? What sorts of jobs?
- 2.4 How many have been filled through this process? With what success? (quality of recruits, retention etc.)
- 2.5 How would you rate the success of other interactions (where relevant) such as work placements? Do you expect to continue dealing with EZ? If not, why not?

3 Interaction with other EZ Providers

3.1 Do you have any dealings with (*names of other local EZ Providers*)

3.2 If so, repeat questions 2.1 to 2.5

4 Interaction with Jobcentre Plus

4.1 Do you have any dealings with Jobcentre Plus, locally or nationally? Do you continue to deal with them as well as EZ?

4.2 If no, have you ever dealt with Jobcentre Plus? (probe for why not and why respondent decided to deal with EZ)

4.3 If so, please describe briefly your dealings with them (recruitment, job fairs etc., New Deal, other)

4.4 How would you say that your experience with Jobcentre Plus compares with your experiences with EZ Provider(s). Probe for quality/suitability of recruits, in-work support, quality/flexibility/responsiveness of advisors etc.)

5 Any other comments regarding recruitment through EZ and/or JCP

5.1 Do you think <Zone> offers a distinct service? What are the key qualities of that service?

5.2 Does <Zone> provide added value to your business? In what way?

Evaluation of Multiple Provider Employment Zones: Phase 2

Interview guide: EZ managers

Note to interviewer: this discussion guide covers a lot of ground. Not all questions will be relevant to every respondent and it may not be possible to cover every question in every interview or focus group. Please make appropriate notes in your report to indicate where questions were not relevant or not covered due to time constraints.

1. Background information and changes over past year

- 1.1. Recap of main organisational information covered in Phase 1 (*note: we hope to gain access to notes from 2005 interviews or collect basic information by telephone prior to field visit*)
 - 1.1.1. Management and staffing
 - 1.1.2. Premises and related operational matters
 - 1.1.3. Scale and nature of operation; numbers of customers in different groups, caseloads etc
 - 1.1.4. Delivery arrangements, partners etc.
- 1.2. Key changes since March 2005 in the above

2. Development and operation of local and wider networks

- 2.1. How do the PAs develop and update their understanding of the local labour market? How has this changed over the past year or so? E.g.
 - 2.1.1. Links with employers
 - 2.1.2. Links with Jobcentre Plus
 - 2.1.3. Links with other EZs (in this area, in other areas)
 - 2.1.4. Links with other relevant agencies (LSC, Connexions, local authorities etc.)
 - 2.1.5. Participation in formal networks, partnerships etc.
- 2.2. How are relations with Jobcentre Plus / DWP? How has this changed over time? (*probe re different types of staff – PAs, lone parent advisers, management*)
- 2.3. How does the EZ attract vacancies and make submissions (and what is the role of PAs in this, if any)? Does this differ according to customer group? Any changes over the past year or so?
- 2.4. What external provision does the EZ use (and how do PAs relate to external Providers)? Variations by customer group, type of service provided etc. Any changes in time in extent / nature of external provision?

3. Performance indicators and incentives

- 3.1. What performance indicators does the EZ use? How are these developed and how have they changed over time?
- 3.2. What are the main incentives and disincentives of the EZ contracting and performance framework and how are these identified and managed?

4. The random assignment process

- 4.1. What feedback does the EZ get from customers about the operation of the random assignment model?
- 4.2. How do you view random assignment? Would you prefer customers to be able to choose their own Provider?

5. Referral process and flows

- 5.1. In what ways have referral processes changed over the past year?
- 5.2. What changes have there been in referral flows (i) overall and (ii) among specific groups? Why?
- 5.3. Do the EZs get most of their referrals from Jobcentre Plus? Has this changed over the past year?

6. Referral of lone parents

- 6.1. (How) does the EZ market its services to lone parents?
- 6.2. How well is referral from the Work Focussed Interviews working? What is working well and what not so well? How could the system be improved?
- 6.3. What is the role of Jobcentre Plus and the EZ in influencing the choices made by lone parents?
- 6.4. Has the new funding arrangement changed the EZ's approach to lone parents? Is it recruiting more actively? If not, why not?
- 6.5. Is competition between EZs in the area affecting their approach to lone parents? If so, in what way(s)? (*probe: marketing, incentives, location of offices, outreach, specialist advisors*)
- 6.6. How and why do lone parent clients make the choice to join this EZ, as opposed to NDLP or another EZ Provider?
- 6.7. Is there evidence of lone parents switching between EZ and NDLP or between different EZ Providers? If so, how and why does this occur?

7. Working with different client groups

- 7.1. What are the key success factors in working with different client groups (from EZ experience and knowledge of good practice across the EZ network)?
 - 7.1.1. Long term unemployed adults
 - 7.1.2. Young people
 - 7.1.3. Early entrants
 - 7.1.4. Lone parents (*where relevant*)
- 7.2. Please give examples of innovation and flexibility in the services provided by the EZ to support participants into work. How has this changed over time?
- 7.3. What are the key issues in incorporating the new groups (young people, early entrants, lone parents) successfully into the EZ? How has this changed over time as a result of experience? E.g.
 - 7.3.1. Networking with external Providers
 - 7.3.2. Marketing of services to employers
 - 7.3.3. Influence on clients' works plans, skills, confidence, motivation towards employment
 - 7.3.4. Support in employment (up to and beyond 13 weeks)
 - 7.3.5. Impacts on clients that do not enter work from the programme
 - 7.3.6. Work with 'hardest-to-help' young people (e.g. drug dependency, basic skills needs etc.)
- 7.4. How does the EZ implement the 'rights and responsibilities' agenda? What processes are in place for sanctioning? What role do PAs play in this process?

8. Specific issues: lone parents

- 8.1. What systems are in place for voluntary clients and how do these differ from those for mandatory groups? Changes over time?
- 8.2. How does the PAs deal with specific barriers to employment facing lone parents? E.g. childcare, health, confidence, skills. Changes over time?
- 8.3. How does the EZ provide in-work support for lone parents? Is 13 weeks long enough for lone parent in-work support?

9. Specific issues: young people

- 9.1. How does EZ provision differ from NDYP? Changes over time?
- 9.2. How do young people view their experiences on EZ and NDYP? E.g. do they feel EZ offers more choice/flexibility etc?

10. Specific issues: early entrants

- 10.1. What are the EZ's policies regarding marketing to early entrants? (How have these changed over the past year? Why? Have there been any particular recruitment drives (or moratoria)?
- 10.2. How does the EZ approach customers with a range of disadvantages? How does this differ from other groups? Main differences between JCP and EZ provision. Changes over time?
- 10.3. Does the EZ recruit specialist help for this group? If so, what types of help, from whom and with what success? How does this differ from JCP provision for this group?
- 10.4. How might provision for these groups be improved?

11. Sustainability

- 11.1 What is the EZ doing to promote sustainability of employment? (*probe: in-work advisors, 13-week incentives, any new innovations*) How well are these approaches working?
- 11.2 How is the EZ dealing with people who return to you having not sustained employment for 13 weeks? What types of approach appear to work best?

12. Relations between Jobcentre Plus and EZ Providers

- 12.1 How are relations between yourselves and Jobcentre Plus? How has this changed over time? (*probe re different types of staff – PAs, lone parent advisers, management*)

13. Added value of EZ

- 13.1 What, in your view, are the distinctive features of EZs?
- 13.2 Is there anything that EZs do (in delivery / service provision) that Jobcentre Plus is unable to do?
- 13.3 What else could EZs do?
- 13.4 What added value do you feel that EZs are bringing to the local labour market?

14. Other issues not covered above

Evaluation of Multiple Provider Employment Zones: Phase 2

Group discussion guide: EZ Personal Advisors

Note to interviewer: this discussion guide covers a lot of ground. Not all questions will be relevant to every respondent and it may not be possible to cover every question in every interview or focus group. Please make appropriate notes in your report to indicate where questions were not relevant or not covered due to time constraints.

- 1. Background information and changes over past year**
 - 1.1. Recap of main information covered in Phase 1 (*note: we cannot gain access to notes from 2005 interviews but SRC will attempt to collect basic information by telephone prior to field visit*)
 - 1.1.1. Backgrounds of PAs, training received etc
 - 1.1.2. Procedures for dealing with clients (+ differences by client group)
 - 1.1.3. Typical size/nature of caseloads etc
 - 1.2. Key changes since March 2005 in the above
- 2. Development and operation of local and wider networks**
 - 2.1. How do the PAs develop and update their understanding of the local labour market? How has this changed over the past year or so? E.g.
 - 2.1.1. Links with employers
 - 2.1.2. Links with Jobcentre Plus
 - 2.1.3. Links with other EZs (in this area, in other areas)
 - 2.1.4. Links with other relevant agencies (LSC, Connexions, local authorities etc.)
 - 2.1.5. Participation in formal networks, partnerships etc.
 - 2.2. How are relations with Jobcentre Plus / DWP? How has this changed over time? (*probe re different types of staff – PAs, lone parent advisers, management*)
 - 2.3. How does the EZ attract vacancies and make submissions (and what is the role of PAs in this, if any)? Does this differ according to customer group? Any changes over the past year or so?
 - 2.4. What external provision does the EZ use (and how do PAs relate to external Providers)? Variations by customer group, type of service provided etc. Any changes in time in extent / nature of external provision?

3. Performance indicators and incentives

- 3.1. What performance indicators does the EZ use for PAs individually and/or as a group? How are these developed and how have they changed over time?
- 3.2. What are the main incentives and disincentives of the performance framework for PAs individually and as a group?

4. The random assignment process

- 4.1. What feedback do PAs get from customers about the operation of the random assignment model?

5. Referral process and flows

- 5.1. In what ways have referral processes changed over the past year?
- 5.2. What changes have there been in referral flows (i) overall and (ii) among specific groups? Why?
- 5.3. Do the EZs get most of their referrals from Jobcentre Plus? Has this changed over the past year?

6. Referral of lone parents

- 6.1. (How) does the EZ market its services to lone parents?
- 6.2. How well is referral from the Work Focussed Interviews working? What is working well and what not so well? How could the system be improved?
- 6.3. How many lone parents are referred by Jobcentre Plus? What is the role of Jobcentre Plus and the EZ in influencing the choices made by lone parents?
- 6.4. Has the new funding arrangement changed the EZ's approach to lone parents? Is it recruiting more actively? If not, why not?
- 6.5. How and why do lone parent clients make the choice to join this EZ as opposed to NDLP or another EZ Provider?
- 6.6. Is competition between EZs in the area affecting their approach to lone parents? If so, in what way(s)? (*probe: marketing, incentives, location of offices, outreach, specialist advisors*)
- 6.7. Is there evidence of lone parents switching between EZ and NDLP or between different EZ Providers? If so, how and why does this occur?

7. Working with different client groups

- 7.1. What are the key success factors in working with different client groups (from PA experience and knowledge of good practice across the EZ network)?
 - 7.1.1. Long term unemployed adults
 - 7.1.2. Young people
 - 7.1.3. Early entrants
 - 7.1.4. Lone parents (*where relevant*)
- 7.2. Please give examples of innovation and flexibility in the services provided by the EZ to support participants into work. How has this changed over time?
- 7.3. What are the key issues in incorporating the new groups (young people, early entrants, lone parents) successfully into the EZ? How has this changed over time as a result of experience? E.g.
 - 7.3.1. Networking with external Providers
 - 7.3.2. Marketing of services to employers
 - 7.3.3. Influence on clients' works plans, skills, confidence, motivation towards employment
 - 7.3.4. Support in employment (up to and beyond 13 weeks)
 - 7.3.5. Impacts on clients that do not enter work from the programme
 - 7.3.6. Work with 'hardest-to-help' young people (e.g. drug dependency, basic skills needs etc.)
- 7.4. How does the EZ implement the 'rights and responsibilities' agenda? What processes are in place for sanctioning? What role do PAs play in this process?

8. Specific issues: lone parents

- 8.1. What systems are in place for voluntary clients and how do these differ from those for mandatory groups? Changes over time?
- 8.2. How does the PAs deal with specific barriers to employment facing lone parents? E.g. childcare, health, confidence, skills. Changes over time?
- 8.3. How does the EZ provide in-work support for lone parents? Is 13 weeks long enough for lone parent in-work support?

9. Specific issues: young people

- 9.1. How does EZ provision differ from NDYP? Changes over time?
- 9.2. How do young people view their experiences on EZ and NDYP? E.g. do they feel EZ offers more choice/flexibility etc?

10. Specific issues: early entrants

- 10.1. What are the EZ's policies regarding marketing to early entrants? (How have these changed over the past year? Why? Have there been any particular recruitment drives (or moratoria)?
- 10.2. How does the EZ approach customers with a range of disadvantages? How does this differ from other groups? Main differences between JCP and EZ provision. Changes over time?
- 10.3. Does the EZ recruit specialist help for this group? If so, what types of help, from whom and with what success? How does this differ from JCP provision for this group?
- 10.4. How might provision for these groups be improved?

11. Sustainability

- 11.1 What is the EZ doing to promote sustainability of employment? (*probe: in-work advisors, 13-week incentives, any new innovations*) How well are these approaches working?
- 11.2 How is the EZ dealing with people who return to you having not sustained employment for 13 weeks? What types of approach appear to work best?

12. Relations between Jobcentre Plus and EZ Providers

- 12.1 To what extent would you describe relations between Jobcentre Plus and the EZ as constructive? How does this vary between different groups of staff (e.g. lone parent advisors)?

13. Added value of EZ

- 13.1. What, in your view, are the distinctive features of EZs?
- 13.2. Is there anything that EZs do (in delivery / service provision) that Jobcentre Plus is unable to do?
- 13.3. What else could EZs do?
- 13.4. What added value do you feel that EZs are bringing to the local labour market?

14. Other issues not covered above

Evaluation of Multiple Provider Employment Zones: Phase 2

Discussion guide: Jobcentre Plus managers

Note to interviewer: this discussion guide covers a lot of ground. Not all questions will be relevant to every respondent and it may not be possible to cover every question in every interview or focus group. Please make appropriate notes in your report to indicate where questions were not relevant or not covered due to time constraints.

1. Background information and changes over past year

- 1.1. Recap of main organisational information covered in Phase 1 (*note: we will not be able to gain access to notes from 2005 interviews but SRC will attempt to collect basic information by telephone prior to field visit*)
 - 1.1.1. Management and staffing (advisors)
 - 1.1.2. Relationship with EZ Providers (formal / informal)
 - 1.1.3. Process of referral to EZ
- 1.2. Key changes since March 2005 in the above

2. Development and operation of local and wider networks

- 2.1. From your experience, how does the EZ keep up with developments in the local labour market? How does this compare with the approach taken by Jobcentre Plus? How has this changed over the past year or so? E.g.
 - 2.1.1. Links with employers
 - 2.1.2. Links with Jobcentre Plus
 - 2.1.3. Links with other EZs (in this area, in other areas)
 - 2.1.4. Links with other relevant agencies (LSC, Connexions, local authorities etc.)
 - 2.1.5. Participation in formal networks, partnerships etc.
- 2.2. How are relations with the EZ(s) managed? How has this changed over time?
- 2.3. How does the EZ attract vacancies and make submissions? How does this differ from the JCP approach? Any changes over the past year or so?
- 2.4. From your knowledge, what external provision does the EZ use? How does this differ from the provision used by Jobcentre Plus? Any changes in time in extent / nature of external provision by JCP and/or EZ?

3. Performance indicators and incentives

- 3.1. From the perspective of Jobcentre Plus, what are the main incentives and disincentives of the EZ contracting and performance framework? (*probe: payment structure for voluntary/mandatory client groups, contribution to JCP targets, disincentive to sanction customers because of profit motive?*)

4. The random assignment process

- 4.1. How does the random assignment model work in JCP offices? How do PAs handle randomly assigning clients?
- 4.2. What feedback does JCP get from customers about the operation of the random assignment model?

5. Referral processes and flows

- 5.1. In what ways have referral processes changed over the past year?
- 5.2. What changes have there been in referral flows (i) overall and (ii) among specific groups? Why?
- 5.3. Do the EZs get most of their referrals from Jobcentre Plus? Has this changed over the past year?

6. Referral of lone parents

- 6.1. How well is referral from the Work Focussed Interviews working? What is working well and what not so well? How could the system be improved?
- 6.2. What is the role of Jobcentre Plus and the EZ in influencing the choices made by lone parents?
- 6.3. As far as you are aware, has the new funding arrangement changed the EZ's approach to lone parents? Are they recruiting more actively? If not, why not?
- 6.4. As far as you are aware, is competition between EZs in the area affecting their approach to lone parents? If so, in what way(s)? (*probe: marketing, incentives, location of offices, outreach, specialist advisors*)
- 6.5. How and why do lone parent clients make the choice between joining a particular EZ, participating in NDLP or not participating in any JCP or EZ programme?
- 6.6. Is there evidence of lone parents switching between EZ and NDLP (outside London) or between different EZ Providers (London)? If so, how and why does this occur?

7. Working with different client groups

- 7.1. What are the key success factors in working with different client groups (from JCP experience and knowledge of good practice across the JCP and/or EZ network)?
 - 7.1.1. Long term unemployed adults
 - 7.1.2. Young people
 - 7.1.3. Early entrants
 - 7.1.4. Lone parents (*where relevant*)
 - 7.1.5. Do you think any one group does particularly well in EZs? Why? Does anyone do particularly badly? Why?
- 7.2. Are there any examples of innovation and flexibility in the services provided by the EZ to support participants into work, which are not offered in JCP? How has this changed over time?
- 7.3. From the JCP perspective, what are the key issues in incorporating the new groups (young people, early entrants, lone parents) successfully into the EZ? How has this changed over time as a result of experience? E.g.
 - 7.3.1. Networking with external Providers
 - 7.3.2. Marketing of services to employers
 - 7.3.3. Influence on clients' works plans, skills, confidence, motivation towards employment
 - 7.3.4. Support in employment (up to and beyond 13 weeks)
 - 7.3.5. Impacts on clients that do not enter work from the programme
 - 7.3.6. Work with 'hardest-to-help' young people (e.g. drug dependency, basic skills needs etc.)

8. Specific issues: lone parents (*where relevant*)

- 8.1. What systems are in place for voluntary clients and how do these differ from those for mandatory groups? Changes over time?
- 8.2. How does the EZ deal with specific barriers to employment facing lone parents? E.g. childcare, health, confidence, skills. How does this compare with JCP provision? Changes over time?

9. Specific issues: young people

- 9.1. How does EZ provision differ from NDYP? Changes over time?
- 9.2. How do young people view their experiences on EZ and NDYP? E.g. do they feel EZ offers more choice/flexibility etc?

10. Specific issues: early entrants

- 10.1. How does the EZ approach customers with a range of disadvantages? How does this differ from other groups? Main differences between JCP and EZ provision. Changes over time?
- 10.2. Does the EZ recruit specialist help for this group? If so, what types of help, from whom and with what success? How does this differ from JCP provision for this group?

11. Sustainability

- 11.1. From your knowledge, what are the EZs doing to promote sustainability of employment? (*probe: in-work advisors, 13-week incentives, any new innovations*) How well are these approaches working?
- 11.2. How are EZs dealing with people who return to them having not sustained employment for 13 weeks? What types of approach appear to work best?

12. Relations between Jobcentre Plus and EZ Providers

- 12.1. In general, how are relations between yourselves and the EZ(s)? How has this changed over time? (*probe re different types of staff – PAs, lone parent advisers, management*)

13. Added value of EZ

- 13.1. What, in your view, are the distinctive features of EZs?
- 13.2. Is there anything that EZs do (in delivery / service provision) that you would like to do? What prevents this?
- 13.3. What else could EZs do?
- 13.4. What added value do you feel that EZs are bringing to the local labour market?

14. Other issues not covered above

Evaluation of Multiple Provider Employment Zones: Phase 2

Discussion guide: Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisors

Note to interviewer: this discussion guide covers a lot of ground. Not all questions will be relevant to every respondent and it may not be possible to cover every question in every interview or focus group. Please make appropriate notes in your report to indicate where questions were not relevant or not covered due to time constraints.

1. Background information and changes over past year

- 1.1. Recap of main organisational information covered in Phase 1 (*note: we will not be able to gain access to notes from 2005 interviews but SRC will attempt to collect basic information by telephone prior to field visit*)
 - 1.1.1. Backgrounds of PAs, training received etc
 - 1.1.2. Procedures for dealing with clients (+ differences by client group)
 - 1.1.3. Typical size/nature of caseloads etc
- 1.2. Key changes since March 2005 in the above

2. Development and operation of local and wider networks

- 2.1. From your experience, how does the EZ keep up with developments in the local labour market? How does this compare with the approach taken by Jobcentre Plus? How has this changed over the past year or so? E.g.
 - 2.1.1. Links with employers
 - 2.1.2. Links with Jobcentre Plus
 - 2.1.3. Links with other EZs (in this area, in other areas)
 - 2.1.4. Links with other relevant agencies (LSC, Connexions, local authorities etc.)
 - 2.1.5. Participation in formal networks, partnerships etc.
- 2.2. How is the relationship with EZ PAs managed? How has this changed over time?
- 2.3. How does the EZ attract vacancies and make submissions? How does this differ from the JCP approach? Any changes over the past year or so?
- 2.4. From your knowledge, what external provision does the EZ use? How does this differ from the provision used by Jobcentre Plus? Any changes in time in extent / nature of external provision by JCP and/or EZ?

3. Performance indicators and incentives

- 3.1. From the perspective of Jobcentre Plus, what are the main incentives and disincentives of the EZ contracting and performance framework? (*probe: payment structure for voluntary/mandatory client groups, contribution to JCP targets, disincentive to sanction customers because of profit motive?*)

4. The random assignment process

- 4.1. How does the random assignment model work in JCP offices? How do PAs handle randomly assigning clients?
- 4.2. What feedback does JCP get from customers about the operation of the random assignment model?

5. Referral process and flows

- 5.1 In what ways have referral processes changed over the past year?
- 5.2 What changes have there been in referral flows (i) overall and (ii) among specific groups? Why?
- 5.3 Do the EZs get most of their referrals from Jobcentre Plus? Has this changed over the past year?

6. Referral of lone parents

- 6.1. How well is referral from the Work Focussed Interviews working? What is working well and what not so well? How could the system be improved?
- 6.2. What is the role of Jobcentre Plus and the EZ in influencing the choices made by lone parents?
- 6.3. As far as you are aware, has the new funding arrangement changed the EZ's approach to lone parents? Are they recruiting more actively? If not, why not?
- 6.4. As far as you are aware, is competition between EZs in the area affecting their approach to lone parents? If so, in what way(s)? (*probe: marketing, incentives, location of offices, outreach, specialist advisors*)
- 6.5. How and why do lone parent clients make the choice between joining a particular EZ, participating in NDLP or not participating in any JCP or EZ programme?
- 6.6. Is there evidence of lone parents switching between EZ and NDLP (outside London) or between different EZ Providers (London)? If so, how and why does this occur?

7. Working with different client groups

- 7.1. What are the key success factors in working with different client groups (from JCP experience and knowledge of good practice across the JCP and/or EZ network)?
 - 7.1.1. Long term unemployed adults
 - 7.1.2. Young people
 - 7.1.3. Early entrants
 - 7.1.4. Lone parents (*where relevant*)
- 7.2. Are there any examples of innovation and flexibility in the services provided by the EZ to support participants into work, which are not offered in JCP? How has this changed over time?

8. Specific issues: lone parents (*where relevant*)

- 8.1. What systems are in place for voluntary clients and how do these differ from those for mandatory groups? Changes over time?
- 8.2. How does the EZ deal with specific barriers to employment facing lone parents? E.g. childcare, health, confidence, skills. How does this compare with JCP provision? Changes over time?
- 8.3. In your experience, how do the EZs provide in-work support for lone parents? Is 13 weeks long enough for lone parent in-work support?

9. Specific issues: young people

- 9.1. How does EZ provision differ from NDYP? Changes over time?
- 9.2. How do young people view their experiences on EZ and NDYP? E.g. do they feel EZ offers more choice/flexibility etc?

10. Specific issues: early entrants

- 10.1. What are the EZs' policies regarding marketing to early entrants? (How) have these changed over the past year? Why? Have there been any particular recruitment drives (or moratoria)?
- 10.2. How does the EZ approach customers with a range of disadvantages? How does this differ from other groups? Main differences between JCP and EZ provision. Changes over time?
- 10.3. Does the EZ recruit specialist help for this group? If so, what types of help, from whom and with what success? How does this differ from JCP provision for this group?

11. Sustainability

- 11.1 From your knowledge, what are the EZs doing to promote sustainability of employment? (*probe: in-work advisors, 13-week incentives, any new innovations*) How well are these approaches working?
- 11.2 How are EZs dealing with people who return to them having not sustained employment for 13 weeks? What types of approach appear to work best?

12. Relations between Jobcentre Plus and EZ Providers

- 12.1. In general, how are relations between yourselves and the EZ(s)? How has this changed over time? (*probe re different types of staff – PAs, lone parent advisers, management*)

13. Added value of EZ

- 13.1. What, in your view, are the distinctive features of EZs?
- 13.2. Is there anything that EZs do (in delivery / service provision) that you would like to do? What prevents this?
- 13.3. What else could EZs do?
- 13.4. What added value do you feel that EZs are bringing to the local labour market?

14. Other issues not covered above

Evaluation of Multiple Provider Employment Zones Discussion guide (telephone interview): stakeholders

1. Background

- 1.1. Nature of organisation – public, private, vol/comm., spatial focus etc.
- 1.2. Role in relation to labour market / welfare to work policy
- 1.3. Awareness of Jobcentre Plus and EZ

2. Interaction with EZ Provider(s) that supplied contact

- 2.1. How did you come into contact with them? How long have you been dealing with them?
- 2.2. What sorts of dealings? (recruitment, partnerships, contracting etc.)
- 2.3. (In what ways) does the EZ contribute to the local labour market?
- 2.4. Any views from client groups or others about the EZ?

3. Interaction with other EZ Providers

- 3.1. Do you have any dealings with (*names of other local EZ Providers*)
- 3.2. If so, repeat questions 2.1 to 2.4

4. Interaction with Jobcentre Plus

- 4.1. Do you have any dealings with Jobcentre Plus, locally or nationally? Do you continue to deal with them as well as EZ?
- 4.2. If no, have you ever dealt with Jobcentre Plus? (probe for why not and why respondent decided to deal with EZ)
- 4.3. If so, please describe briefly your dealings with them
- 4.4. How would you say that your experience with Jobcentre Plus compares with your experiences with EZ Provider(s)

5. Any other comments regarding relationship with EZ and/or JCP

- 5.1. Do you think <Zone> offers a distinct service to employers? What are the key qualities of that service?
- 5.2. Does <Zone> provide added value to employers? In what way?

NO: /
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leeds metropolitan university

Multiple Provider Employment Zones Evaluation 2006 Customer Interview

Section A: Background with Employment Zone Provider (EZP) & Previous Work History

1) When did you first register with (name of EZP)?

..... Day Month Year D/K ☐₄

2) What programme(s) have you participated in prior to EZ (ND, other initiatives)?

.....

.....

.....

3) Are you still registered with/attending (name of EZP)? (please tick one box only)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q4
No	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q5
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Go to Q6

4) How long have you been registered with/attending (name of EZP)? (Then go to Q6)

..... Years..... Months Week..... Days D/K ☐₅

5) How long were you registered with /did you attend (name of EZP)?

..... Years Months Weeks Days D/K ☐₅

5a) Did you leave the programme early (ie before the end of Stage 2)?

(please tick one box only)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q5b
No	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q6
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Go to Q6

5b) When did you leave and why? (probe for Stage 1,2 or 3)

.....

.....

6) Before you registered with / attended (name of EZP) how long was it since your last job?

..... Years Months Weeks Days D/K ☐₅

Never had a job ☐₆ (go to Q7)

6a) What was your last job?

.....

6b) Was it..... ? (please tick one box only)

Full time (more than 16 hours per week)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁
Part time (less than 16 hours per week)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂
Varied	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄

6c) What type of contract did you have, was it.....? (please tick one box only)

Permanent	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁
Temporary	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂
Other	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄

6d) How long were you in that job?

..... **Years** **Months** **Weeks** **Days** **D/K** ☐ ₅

6e) Why did you leave that job?

.....
.....
.....
.....

Section B: Starting with EZ

I'd like you to tell me a little about how you came to participate in the EZ programme (*ask questions A, B or C depending on type of customer*)

7a) Ask Young People (18 to 24):

- How were you referred from JCP?
- Was the process explained to you in detail?

7b) Ask Early Entrants:

- Did JCP explain to you why you were being referred to the EZ programme?
- Did you feel that you had a choice about joining the programme?
- Were you aware that you would have to stay on the programme once you agreed to participate?

7c) Ask Lone Parents:

- Did you discuss which programme to go on (including NDLP outside London)?
- Why did you decide to register with (name of EZP)?
- Have you remained with this provider or changed to another provider? Why?

.....
.....

Section C: Barriers to Work and Assistance from EZ

8a) When you registered with / first attended (name of EZP) what do you think was stopping you getting a job / returning to work? (Probe for full range of barriers)

.....
.....
.....

8b) Did you discuss these issues with your personal advisor at (Name of EZP)? Did these barriers form part of your EZP action plan? Were there any other barriers / issues identified in your action plan?

.....

.....

.....

8c) To what extent do you think (name of EZP) has helped you address and overcome these barriers? How did (name of EZP) help you to overcome the barriers? (Probe for types of activity/support, whether delivered by EZ / other organisation)

.....

.....

.....

9a) As part of your Action Plan, did you discuss and identify any specific job goals with your personal advisor? What were they?

.....

.....

.....

9b) Did you discuss and agree ways to achieve these goals? What were they?

.....

.....

.....

9c) To what extent do you think (name of EZP) has helped you achieve these goals? How did (name of EZP) help you achieve them? (Probe for types of activity/support, whether delivered by EZ / other organisation)

.....

.....

.....

10) Did you receive any other type of support from (name of EZP) to help you get a job (e.g. financial, training, work placements etc)? (please tick one box only)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q11
No	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q12
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Go to Q12

11) What help did you receive? How useful was this? What was most helpful to you? What was least helpful?

.....

.....

.....

12) Do you think anything else should / could have been done by (name of EZP) to help you overcome your barriers to work / help you achieve your job goals?

.....

.....

.....

13) Do you still have any barriers that stop you getting a job? If yes: what barriers & how are these being dealt with?

.....

.....

Section D: Benefit Payments through EZP

For Early Entrants and Young People ONLY Ask:

14) Whilst you were / have been registered with (name of EZP) they were / are responsible for paying your benefits. Were there / have there been any problems or delays in this process?

.....

.....

.....

Section E: Employment through EZP

15) Whilst registered with (name of EZP) did you get a job? (please tick one box only)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to Q15a
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to Q32
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to Q32

15a) What is/was the job?

.....

15b) Is/was it..... ? (please tick one box only)

Full time (more than 16 hours per week)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Part time (less than 16 hours per week)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Varied	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/>

15c) What type of contract do/did you have, is/was it.....? please tick one box only)

Permanent	<input type="checkbox"/>
Temporary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/>

15d) How long have you been/were you in that job?

..... YearsMonthsWeeks Days D/K ☐

15e) Is/was this the type of work you ideally wanted to do? If no, why did you do it?

.....

.....

.....

15f) What skills did you learn in this job which will be useful to you in the future?

.....

.....

16) How long were you registered with (name of EZP) before you got a job?

..... YearsMonthsWeeks Days D/K ☐

17) How did you find the job? Was it through (name of EZP) contact/JC+/Self/Other? (probe: did EZP submit you for the job?)

.....

.....

.....

18) How many applications did you put in? (probe for EZP submissions / other channels)

.....

18a) How many interviews did you attend? (probe for EZP interviews / other channels)

.....

19) When you first started the job how easy was it for (name of EZP) to sort out your in-work benefits? Were there any problems or delays in this process?

.....

20) After you started the job did you receive any further support from (name of EZP)?
(please tick one box only)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q20a
No	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q21
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Go to Q21

20a) If yes, what? How useful was this?

.....

20b) For how long did you receive support? Was this long enough?

.....

21) To what extent do you think (name of EZP) helped you in getting this job?

.....

22) Are you still in this job? (please tick one box only)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q42 'Impact of MPEZ participation'
No	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q22a

22a) Why not?

.....

23) After that job did you....? (please tick one box only)

Go back to Jobcentre Plus	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q23a
Go back to (name of EZP)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q23b
Go to a new EZ provider	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Go to Q23c
Name of new Provider.....		
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	Go to Q36

23a) What happened when you returned to Jobcentre Plus? How did you feel about going back to Jobcentre Plus?

.....

.....**Now go to Q36**

23b) What happened when you went back to (Name of EZP)?

.....
 Now go to Q24

23c) Why did you decide to go to a different provider?

.....

24) Did you get another job when you returned to (name of EZP)?

Ask those who have used more than one provider: Did you get a job whilst you were with (name of new provider)? (please tick one box only)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q24a
No	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q36
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Go to Q36

24a) What is/was the job?

24b) Is/was it..... ? (please tick one box only)

Full time (more than 16 hours per week)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁
Part time (less than 16 hours per week)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂
Varied	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄

24c) What type of contract do/did you have, is/was it.....? please tick one box only)

Permanent	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁
Temporary	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂
Other	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
.....	
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄

24d) How long have you been/were you in that job?

..... Years Months Weeks Days D/K ☐ ₅

24e) Is/was this the type of work you ideally wanted to do? If no, why did you do it?

.....

24f) What skills did you learn in this job which will be useful to you in the future?

.....

25) How long were you back with (name of EZP) before you got this job?

Ask those who have used more than one provider: How long were you with (name of new provider) before you got a job?

..... Years Months Weeks Days D/K ☐ ₅

26) How did you find the job? Was it through (name of EZP / name of new EZP) contact/JC+/Self/Other? (probe: did EZP / new EZP submit you for the job?)

.....

27) When you first started the job how easy was it for (name of EZP / name of new EZP) to sort out your in-work benefits? Were there any problems or delays in this process?

.....

28) After you started the job did you receive any further support from (name of EZP / name of new EZP)? (please tick one box only)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q28a
No	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q29
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Go to Q29

28a) If yes, what? How useful was this?

.....

28b) For how long did you receive support? Was this long enough?

.....

29) To what extent do you think (name of EZP/ name of new EZP) helped you in getting this job?

.....

30) Are you still in this job? (please tick one box only)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q42 'Impact of MPEZ participation'
No	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q30a

30a) Why not?

.....

31) After that job did you....? (please tick one box only)

Go back to Jobcentre Plus	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q31a
Go back to (name of EZP)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q31b
Go to a new EZ provider	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Go to Q31c
Name of new Provider.....		
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	Go to Q36

31a) What happened when you returned to Jobcentre Plus? How did you feel about going back to Jobcentre Plus?

.....

Now go to Q36

31b) What happened when you went back to (Name of EZP)? Did they try to find you another job?

.....
 **Now go to Q36**

31c) What happened with (Name of new EZP)? Did they try to find you another job?

.....
 **Now go to Q36**

Ask those who have / did NOT get a job whilst registered with their EZP

32) Why do you think you were/have been unable to get a job through (name of EZP)?

.....

33) Did you apply/have you applied for any jobs whilst registered with (name of EZP)?
 (please tick one box only)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q33a
No	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q33b
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Go to Q34

33a) Why do you think you didn't get any of these jobs? Probe was it an EZ submission, other channels etc

.....

 **Go to Q34**

33b) Why didn't you apply / haven't you applied for any?

.....

34) Did you attend / have you attended any job interviews whilst registered with (name of EZP)? (please tick one box only)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q34a
No	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q34b
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Go to Q35

34a) Why do you think you didn't get any of these jobs? Probe was it an EZ vacancy etc

.....

 **Go to Q35**

34b) Why do you think you haven't had any job interviews?

.....

35) After the initial 26 weeks (Stage 2) with (name of EZP), did you stay on with them for a Follow on period? (please tick one box only)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q35a
No	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q35d
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Go to Q36
Not Applicable (not at 26 week stage yet)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	Go to Q36

35a) How long did you stay on with (name of EZP) for?

..... YearsMonthsWeeks Days D/K ☐

35b) Why did you decide to stay on? Whose decision was it?

.....
.....

35c) Did anything change in the way (name of EZP) helped you in this time? If yes, what?

.....

.....Go to Q36

35d) Why didn't you stay on?

.....
.....

35e) What did you do instead? Probe back to JCP, another provider, education/training, inactive benefits etc

.....

Section F: Current Employment Circumstances

36) Are you currently in work? (please tick one box only)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to Q36a
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to Q37
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to Q37

36a) What is your current job?

36b) Is it.....? (please tick one box only)

Full time (more than 16 hours per week)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Part time (less than 16 hours per week)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Varies	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/>

36c) What type of contract do you have, is it.....? (please tick one box only)

Permanent	<input type="checkbox"/>
Temporary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/>

36d) How long have you been in this job?

..... YearsMonthsWeeks Days D/K ☐

36e) How did you find this job? Was it through (name of EZP) contact/JC+/Self/Other?

.....

36f) Is this the type of work you ideally want to do? If no, why are you doing it?

.....

36g) What skills have you learnt in this job which will be useful to you in the future?

.....

 **Now go to Q42**

If not currently in work ask:

37) What are *you* doing? (please tick one box only)

Training	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q38
Education	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q38
Unemployed (looking for work)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Go to Q39
Inactive (not looking for work)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	Go to Q40
Other	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅	Go to most appropriate section

38) What type of training course / education programme are you doing?

.....

38a) Is it..... ? (please tick one box only)

Full time (more than 16 hours per week)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁
Part time (less than 16 hours per week)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂
Varies	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄

38b) How long have you been doing the training course / education programme?

..... **Years** **Months** **Weeks** **Days** **D/K** ☐ ₅

38c) How did you find the training course / education programme – was it through EZP contact / JC+ / Self / Other?

.....

38d) Will the training help you to get the type of work you want to do? What are you learning which will be useful to you getting a job in the future?

.....

Ask those in Training / Education and the Unemployed (looking for Work)

39) Are you **currently looking for work?** (please tick one box only)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q39a
No	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q40
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Go to Q40

39a) **What type of job are you looking for?**

.....

39b) **Will it be..... ?** (please tick one box only)

Full time (more than 16 hours per week)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁
Part time (less than 16 hours per week)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂
Either	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄

39c) **What are you doing to find a job?** Probe: have you gone back to JC+ / registered on another programme / using another EZP / searching yourself.

.....

.....

.....

39d) **Do you think your experience on the EZ Programme will help you get a job? How will it help?**

.....

.....

.....

.....**Now go to Q42**

Ask those in Training / Education who are NOT looking for work and the Inactive (Not looking for work)

40) **Why are you not currently looking for work?**

.....

.....

41) **Do you think your experience with on the EZ programme will help you get a job? How will it help?**

.....

.....

.....

Section G: Impact of MPEZ Participation

42) **Was your experience of the EZ programme what you expected it to be?**

.....

.....

43) **What is / was good about the EZ programme?**

.....

.....

44) **What could / should be improved?**

.....

.....

45) Has your experience of being on the EZ programme changed the way you think about work? (please tick one box only)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q45a
No	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q46
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Go to Q46

45a) If yes, how and why?

.....

.....

.....

46) As a result of you being on the EZ programme do you think your job related skills have increased, decreased or stayed the same? (please tick one box only)

Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q46a
Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q46b
Stayed the same	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Go to Q47
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	Go to Q47

46a) If increased, how and why?

.....

.....

..... **Go to Q47**

46b) If decreased, how and why?

.....

.....

.....

47) As a result of you being on the EZ programme do you think your job search skills have increased, decreased or stayed the same? (please tick one box only)

Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q47a
Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q47b
Stayed the same	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Go to Q48
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	Go to Q48

47a) If increased, how and why?

.....

.....

..... **Go to Q48**

47b) If decreased, how and why?

.....

.....

.....

48) As a result of you being on the EZ programme do you think your self confidence has increased, decreased or stayed the same? (please tick one box only)

Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q48a
Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q48b
Stayed the same	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Go to Q49
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	Go to Q49

48a) If increased, how and why?

.....

 Go to Q49

48b) If decreased, how and why?

.....

49) As a result of you being on the EZ programme do you think your motivation has increased, decreased or stayed the same? (please tick one box only)

Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q49a
Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q49b
Stayed the same	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Go to Q50
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	Go to Q50

49a) If increased, how and why?

.....

 Go to Q50

49b) If decreased, how and why?

.....

50) As a result of you being on the EZ programme do you think your career prospects have increased, decreased or stayed the same? (please tick one box only)

Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q50a
Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q50b
Stayed the same	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Go to Q51
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	Go to Q51

50a) If increased, how and why?

.....

 Go to Q51

50b) If decreased, how and why?

.....

51) Knowing what you know now would you choose to return to (name of EZP)? Why?

Ask those who have used more than one provider: Knowing what you know now, which of the providers would you choose? Why?

.....

Early Entrants, Young People (18 to 24) and Lone Parents IN BIRMINGHAM, GLASGOW AND LIVERPOOL, go to Question 53:

For Lone Parents in LONDON Ask:

52) Do you think it was a good thing that you were able to choose which provider you went to? (please tick one box only)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q52a
No	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q52b
Wasn't aware I had a choice	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q53
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Go to Q55

52a) Why?

.....

Now go to Q55

52b) Why?

.....

Now go to Q55

For Early Entrants, Young People (18 to 24) and Lone Parents IN BIRMINGHAM, GLASGOW AND LIVERPOOL and Lone Parents in London who didn't know they had a choice Ask:

53) If you had had a choice would you have preferred another provider? If yes why?

.....

54) Do you think that it would be a good thing if you were able to choose which provider to go to? (please tick one box only)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q54a
No	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q54b
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Go to Q55

54a) Why?

.....
Now go to Q55

54b) Why?

.....
Now go to Q55

55) How does the service you received from (name of EZP) differ from that provided by Jobcentre Plus?

Ask those who have changed provider: How does the service you received from (name all providers used) differ from that provided by Jobcentre Plus? (Note we are trying to find out differences between JC+ and the providers NOT between the providers themselves)

.....

56) Do you think the job search service provided by (name of EZP) is better, worse or about the same as that provided by Jobcentre Plus?

Ask those who have changed provider: Do you think the job search service provided by (name all providers used) is better, worse or about the same as that provided by Jobcentre Plus?

(please tick one box only)

Better	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q56a
Worse	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q56b
About the same	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Go to Q57
Some better some worse	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	Go to Q56c (only for users of more than one provider)
Not Applicable	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅	Go to Q57
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₆	Go to Q57

56a) If better, how and why?

.....
 **Go to Q57**

56b) If worse, how and why?

.....
 **Go to Q57**

56c) If some better and some worse, who, how and why?

.....

57) Do you think the advisors at (name of EZP/ names of all EZPs used) are better, worse or about the same as those at Jobcentre Plus? (please tick one box only)

Better	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q57a
Worse	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q57b
About the same	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Go to Q58
Some better some worse	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	Go to Q57c (only for users of more than one provider)
Not Applicable	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅	Go to Q58
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₆	Go to Q58

57a) If better, how and why?

.....
 **Go to Q58**

57b) If worse, how and why?

.....
 **Go to Q58**

57c) If some better and some worse, who, how and why?

.....

58) Do you think the support provided by (name of EZP/ names of all EZPs used) is / are better, worse or about the same as that provided by Jobcentre Plus?

(please tick one box only)

Better	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q58a
Worse	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q58b
About the same	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Go to Q59
Some better some worse	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	Go to Q58c (only for users of more than one provider)
Not Applicable	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅	Go to Q59
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₆	Go to Q59

58a) If better, how and why?

.....
 Go to Q59

58b) If worse, how and why?

.....
 Go to Q59

58c) If some better and some worse, who, how and why?

.....

59) Do you think the offices and facilities provided by (name of EZP/ names of all EZPs used) are better, worse or about the same as those provided by Jobcentre Plus?

(please tick one box only)

Better	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Go to Q59a
Worse	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Go to Q59b
About the same	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Go to Q60
Some better some worse	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	Go to Q59c (only for users of more than one provider)
Not Applicable	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅	Go to Q60
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₆	Go to Q60

59a) If better, how and why?

.....
 Go to Q60

59b) If worse, how and why?

.....
 Go to Q60

59c) If some better and some worse, who, how and why?

.....

60) Overall do you think the service provided by (name of EZP/ names of all EZPs used) is better, worse or about the same as that provided by Jobcentre Plus?

(please tick one box only)

Better	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁
Worse	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂
About the same	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
Some better some worse	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅

Section G: General

61) Ask all: Do you have any other comments you'd like to make about EZs?

62) Ask all: Would you be willing to be contacted again for further research into Employment Zones? (please tick one box only)

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

Thank Respondent & Close

Interviewer Notes / Comments

Interviewer:..... Length of Interview:

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Sector Skills Development Agency www.ssda.org.uk

